University of Alberta

An Exploration of the Actions and Reflections of an Effective High School Principal

by

Betty Jane Davis ©

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Abstract

This descriptive study explored the actions and reflections of one effective senior high school principal. The setting was a large urban high school. Direct observation; reflective conversation; interviews with staff, students, and parents; document analysis; and the involvement of another principal as discussant were used to gather data.

The study focused on the choices that the principal made about actions to be taken to lead the school toward meeting her goals. A review of the historical background of the school set the actions of the principal within the context of the school environment. This study illustrated the complexity of a large urban high school and the issues faced on a daily basis.

The major findings of the study included the philosophy and beliefs of the principal. Her beliefs about learning and schooling focused on high standards and setting personal goals in a safe, orderly environment. Her actions flowed from this simple focus, and all programs and practices reflected her philosophy. Her use of language reaffirmed positive aspects of the school. Although the school was large and the staff had much autonomy, they felt a closeness to the principal. She spent her time communicating—in writing, in conversation, and in interactions within the school and the community.

Reflections on the actions of this principal began with an analysis of the characteristics of the principal which have enabled her to be a successful administrator. What appeared seamless and automatic at first observation was deliberate and clearly planned by the principal. The concept of team and the involvement of staff, students, and parents in decision making were critical to the principal's leadership. There was a conscious attempt to

personalize interactions and develop pride in this large school. Humor and laughter were very evident.

Because of the philosophy and relationships, many practices had been put into place, including modelling, delegation, accountability, flexibility, proactivity, toughness, and celebration. Programs such as advisor and ambassador had also developed in the school to enhance the opportunities for student success. The school functioned in the community, and the community was involved with the school.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

How does an effective high school principal choose among the many and varied tasks that are required in a large urban high school? How do those choices assist the principal in achieving her goals for the school? I was fortunate to have the extended opportunity to explore and examine the actions and the reflections of one effective high school principal in an attempt to understand that principal and her leadership. In this study I have drawn together the threads which I believed have enabled that school to flourish under that principal's leadership.

Introduction

Research on effective schools and effective school leaders has focused heavily on the elementary school and elementary school principal. Less research has been done in large urban high schools.

Urban High Schools

Louis and Miles (1990) in their research on the urban high school identified characteristics of these schools that distinguish them from schools at other levels and other locations. They suggested that one of the problems within high schools is the diversity of purposes and objectives. Much debate exists about what an excellent high school should look like:

> Should the emphasis be on a classical academic education? On preparing children for the complex, critical thinking skills that may be needed in the next century? On making sure that they have basic skills needed to move into the world of work? And how much attention should be paid to individual guidance and social development? Are sports and extra-curricular activities an important part of the educational experience, a reward for academic achievement, or a frill? Should students be regularly

> tested and held back if they don't make the grade, or urged to move on to prevent discouragement and early dropout? And how about vocational education: Is it central to the role of today's high schools, or an outmoded concept that should be abandoned? (p. 8)

Miller (1990) indicated that holistic educators believe schooling should be far broader, primarily focusing on the socialization of young people because "the values and beliefs of our culture are fundamentally impoverished and unsatisfactory" (p. 158).

The structure of the high school organization has added to the complexity. The large number of students, student movement about the school, the department organization, and ability tracking often led to divisions within the school and competition for resources. Differences in student ability, cultural background, and socio-economic status led to further fragmentation of the school program. Legislation that had been established to deal with desegregation and equal opportunity in the United States caused further logistical complications for urban high schools (Louis & Miles, 1990).

The principal could no longer meet all the leadership demands within the school. Conflicting requirements from school district offices add to the demands of the role of the principal. Louis and Miles (1990) also identified the need for leadership in a large urban high school to be spread among an administrative team.

Although urban high schools have been studied, there is a gap in the literature examining how the effective high school principal acts and how these actions relate to the issues and challenges of the task of leadership in a large urban high school.

Leadership

Leadership has received much study both in organizations and in public education. The definitions that are put forward for leadership vary.

Earlier definitions of leadership focused on leaders as the individuals who could exert power over their followers—"bossing," according to Patterson (1993, p. 2). This view defined leadership as supervising and directing. More recent definitions consider leaders within the culture of the organization (Bennis, 1989, 1993) to be functioning as social architects and transforming their followers. This view attaches a qualitative definition to leadership, separating it from management (Kotter, 1985, 1990) and suggesting that leaders are those who effect change in an organization.

Within an organization there can be conflicting views of leadership. Shields (1992) studied 55 educators' views of leaders. Using the metaphor of the school as an ocean liner, she found a distinction between principals who saw their role as the captain in charge of the ship, and teachers who saw leadership as more holistic, as a quality of the organization, not of a person.

The more I read, the more I begin to question all the definitions offered for leadership. Some aspects of the "great man" theory have much appeal. I have strong feelings that there are some qualities that an individual must possess in order to be an outstanding leader. What I sense is that these qualities, rather than being traits within the individual, are orientations, perhaps the personal magnetism, of the leader which enable others to become motivated to excel. There is a necessity for leaders, in times of rapid change, to have a vision of the future and ensure that their followers have the motivation to work with them to achieve common goals. It is through this visionary leadership that the leader creates a "roadmap" to the future (Manasse, 1986). Through his discussion of moral leadership, Sergiovanni (1992) has linked personal values and visionary leadership. He has also linked personal values and social ethos with the leader's goals.

Foster (1986) in his discussion of Greenfield pointed out the importance of understanding individual values as a way of making events meaningful. I wonder if it is not so much what a leader does as what the leader values and intends by his or her actions that distinguishes the great from the mediocre. The values the leader holds create meaning for the leader and determine the action to be taken. We use our understanding of the leaders's values to invest the actions with meaning. The importance of values and the moral nature of leadership cannot be understated.

Instructional Leadership

Much of the literature on school leadership has focused on instructional leadership. Instructional leadership is defined qualitatively and is associated with effective principals and effective schools. Definitions of instructional leadership have varied from the principal providing direct instruction and demonstration of instructional skills, to providing indirect instructional leadership (Campbell, Bridges, & Nystrand, 1977) by giving teachers resources to ensure appropriate programming for students. McEvoy (1987) suggested that principals demonstrate instructional leadership by their everyday acts; McNally (1992) suggested it was by their routine behavior.

Instructional leadership has been studied from the perspectives of psychology, sociology, social psychology, and anthropology. What has been done, for the most part, is an analysis of effective leaders, based on their responses to questionnaires and interviews. Another area of study has been an analysis of the results achieved by effective leaders. The area that has *not been well studied is the area of "unfolding situations"* (Immegart, 1988, p. 268). Studying a leader as the leader actually provides leadership allows the researcher not only to report what the leader says but also to understand how the leader acts throughout an experience as it develops (Wolcott, 1973). An opportunity to discuss the reasons for the actions is also available in this type of research. Further, other individuals who are part of the setting can provide interpretations of the situation. Through the study of unfolding situations, processes as well as results can be analysed.

Lancy (1993) indicated that "we do research when we are uncertain about what the state of the world is and are curious or concerned to reduce that uncertainty" (p. 234). Thus I planned my study.

Coming to the Question

Curiosity is in my spirit; teaching is in my genes. I knew I would be a teacher before I started school. My dolls were my students, as were any unsuspecting neighbor children I could coerce into sitting in the "desks" in the basement. The blue box was always filled with sharpened pencils. My mother wanted me to be a teacher too.

Plans went as scheduled and I worked toward my goal. My first class was a Grade 9 homeroom. Everyone was either taller than I was or more worldly. They taught me much that year; I hope I returned the favor.

After a few years of teaching and a few years of consulting, I became an administrator, an assistant principal of a K to 9 school. Three years later I was appointed to an elementary principalship; in three more years I became a junior high school principal. I spent two years in that position, and that ended my career in schools. Senior high school was where I thought I wanted to be, in the beginning, but I have not as yet had that experience.

The rest of my career has been in central administration. I have been responsible for programs and curriculum in senior high schools, I have supervised high school principals, but I have not been a leader in a high school. Hence, I chose to enhance my understanding of one person's experience as the focus of my dissertation. My next assignment is a high school principalship. I am grateful for the opportunity to have studied with an expert.

The Question

The purpose of this study was to understand what an effective principal in a large urban senior high school does, how that principal chooses the actions in which to engage, and how those actions relate to the goals set for the school. I wanted to identify what issues and problems are faced. The following questions were considered as I involved myself with the principal, staff, and students in the school and reflected on what I had experienced:

What are the everyday practices of an effective high school principal?

How are this high school principal's actions related to the goals for the school?

How are the principal's actions related to developing relationships with staff, students, and the community?

How are the principal's actions related to staff and student outcomes?

How are the actions of this effective high school principal explained and interpreted by the principal, staff, students, and parents?

Significance of the Study

This descriptive study illustrates what one effective high school principal does. The study provides a montage of the principal and her school. Most of the research done in the area of leadership has been done quantitatively, using surveys, questionnaires, and interviews which ask administrators to self-report about activities that have already occurred. This study reports on this leader's actions related to her goals and beliefs and how this leader reflected on what she had chosen to do. The perceptions and reflections of others within the school are included. It was not a study of just what the principal said; rather, it also included what the principal did and how those actions impacted the staff, students, parents, and community.

The study was not designed to draw any generalizations. However, the study has made a contribution to the literature regarding effective leadership by helping to illustrate the complexity of a large urban high school and the issues faced on a daily basis. It is also one of a small number of studies which describes the actions of a woman administrator. From a more practical perspective, the study has identified activities and strategies that worked for this effective senior high school principal and that may provide insight for practicing administrators and administrators in training. Preservice and inservice programs could be created to assist principals in developing the skills demonstrated by this effective high school principal. The principal's reflections may assist other administrators in enhancing their effectiveness. Senior administrators may view the study as providing considerations for selecting potential high school administrators.

Assumptions, Limitations, and Delimitations

Assumptions

The study was undertaken on the basis of several assumptions. I assumed that each of the individuals involved would understand and describe experiences differently. Every individual would interpret actions in a unique way. As well, I assumed that those individuals who had been at the school for extended periods of time could and would recall the past. That a descriptive study would be an appropriate design to share this principal's story was another assumption.

The study was also informed by my belief that leadership involves personality and values which influence and inform actions.

Limitations

The study was limited by a number of factors. One of the limitations of the study was that I was a female researcher gathering data about a female principal. This may have had an impact on the rationales given by the male participants. I have a presence in the school district, and the knowledge of my position may have been a limiting factor for some participants, although my position with the district on my return was expected to be school-based because my previous position had been eliminated. Three of the teachers had been on staff with me when I was a teacher, assistant principal, and principal. Several others were in schools which I supervised as an associate superintendent. Although I did not think so, the extent to which I developed trust with all of the participants may have been limited by such knowledge.

The consistency of the stories from all the participants was a frustration. The lack of negative or critical commentary suggested that there may be data left undisclosed or that this uniformity was a function of the length of the principal's tenure at the school. It also suggested that people who may have been critical of the principal's administration may have been no longer at the school. However, I was unable to identify any such individuals in my discussions with principal and staff.

My own skills and ability in gathering and analyzing information may have influenced the study findings.

Delimitations

My study has been delimited to a study of one high school principal who had a reputation for effectiveness. The study was confined to one principal's actions and reflections and comments made by staff, students, parents, and the community. The data were gathered over a school year in this school.

Outline of the Dissertation

Chapter 2 contains a review of the literature in the areas of leadership, instructional leadership, and the large urban high school, while an explication of the methodology is found in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 includes the major findings of the study, and Chapter 5 contains reflections and discussion.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

I began this study with a review of the literature on leadership, in particular, instructional leadership; and on the large urban high school. The first phase of the literature review was done to determine how leadership has been viewed in a general sense both by educators and by researchers in business and management. The second phase of the literature review focused specifically on the area of instructional leadership. This portion of the review was done to determine what had been studied specifically related to schools and the role of the principal. The third phase of the review focused on the large urban high school, both in terms of studies done and literature written on the issues and challenges faced by large urban high schools.

Throughout the review, my intention was to determine not only what had been researched, but also what questions remained. As I reflected on the literature, I saw that, in studies of successful high schools and studies of change in high schools that had been done, the principal was seen to be critical to the success of the school. I wanted to know if studies had determined what components of principal behavior were essential to effective leadership. None of the studies done in senior high schools had focused exclusively on the principal's actions as they were related to the goals of the school.

Leadership

Psychological Studies

Early studies of leadership focused on the leader as an individual (Blumberg & Greenfield, 1980; Lipham, Rankin, & Hoeh, 1985; Ohde & Murphy, 1993). The attributes, traits, abilities, or skills of that individual were thought to determine whether that individual would be an effective leader. Nelson and Quick (1994) reported that in 1948 Stogdill concluded that specific personality traits were not necessary for a leader but there must be some relationship between the characteristics of the leader and the characteristics of the followers.

The "great man" concept of leadership (Bennis, 1989; Lipham et al., 1985; Sashkin & Lassey, 1983) tried to identify what it is about great leaders that made them so effective. Although much research has been conducted to determine the characteristics of the "great man," there has been little evidence to support the notion that personality is the determining factor in leadership. Covey (1989) outlined habits that he contended enhanced the opportunity for leaders to be great.

Mazzarella and Grundy (1989) have synthesized much of the literature to develop "a portrait in time of what we *now* assume to be the qualities that make up a leader in *our* culture" (p. 9). The research shows that there are some qualities that appear to correlate with leadership even though leaders when studied are more different than alike. They concluded:

> Typical educational leaders are a little more intelligent (but not too much more) than nonleaders. As children they were probably not firstborn and were probably allowed at an early age to make many of their own decisions. It is likely that they came from a higher socioeconomic group than did their followers. . . . Effective educational leaders are outgoing, good at working with people, and have good communication abilities and skills. They take initiative, are aware of their goals, and feel secure. As proactive

> people, they are not afraid to stretch the rules, but also understand the compromises that must be made to get things done. (pp. 26-27)

The research based on the leader as a personality is flawed (Immegart, 1988). There is no distinction made between women and men leaders or between managers and leaders. The focus is on the inherent characteristics of the individual, described in isolation. The tasks are not differentiated, and the followers are not considered. Foster (1986) stated: "If leadership were to be taken seriously in these theories, then they would have to acknowledge the fact that leadership, by definition, does not exist in isolation, without followers" (p. 172).

Sociological Studies

Leadership has also been researched from the perspective of the leader and the group by researchers such as Katz, Macoby and Morse, 1950, Getzels and Guba (cited in Lipham, 1988), and Lipham and Rankin (cited in Lipham, Rankin & Hoeh, 1985). Leadership-styles questionnaires such as the Leader Behavior Description Questionnaire (LBDQ) developed by Halpin and Winer (1957) have been used to study leader behavior. Other leader behaviors that have been looked at include decision-making techniques (Likert, 1961), orientations toward work and people (Blake & Mouton, 1975), and risk taking.

Although this perspective considered the group as well as the leader's style, the context in which the leader acted was ignored. Immegart (1988) criticized style conceptualizations for their rigor and their substance. He indicated that the search for the "best" style has been abandoned and that the most effective leaders varied their styles relative to the situation.

Socio-Psychological Studies

Recognition of the situational nature of leader behavior (Hemphill, 1949) led to studies of leadership using a socio-psychological perspective. These situational or contingency theories (Fiedler, 1974; Hersey & Blanchard, 1969; House & Mitchell, 1974; Yukl, 1981) recognized that the leader and the group vary in their orientation, depending on the nature of the situation.

Anthropological Studies

A more recent theoretical perspective on leadership emphasized the importance of the leader within the culture of an organization. Values and symbols became critical to the leaders. Individual authors have stressed aspects of culture including visioning, and valuing, as well as specific values of trust and collaboration.

Culture. Sergiovanni (1990) identified the power of cultural leadership as that which "comes from defining, strengthening, and articulating enduring values, beliefs, and cultural strands that give the school its identity over time" (p. 87). His leader as "high priest" served to bond together the staff, student, parents, and others to work toward a common cause. Leadership was personal, made up of one's heart, head, and hand. For Sergiovanni (1991),

> the *heart* of leadership has to do with what a person believes, values, dreams about, and is committed to—that person's *personal vision*. . . . The *head* of leadership has to do with the theories of practice each of us has developed over time and our ability to reflect on the situations we face in light of these theories. . . . And finally, the *hand* of leadership has to do with the actions we take, the decisions we make, the leadership and management behaviors we use as our strategies become institutionalized in the form of school programs, policies, and procedures. (p. 321)

Schein (1985) believed that leaders play vital roles in reinforcing culture, by where their attention is focused, how they react to crises, how they behave, how they allocate rewards, and how they hire and fire individuals. Kotter (1985, 1990) supported the importance of culture and specified that competent leadership can emerge only in certain kinds of cultures. He contended that without individual excellence within the culture, organizational excellence is impossible.

The concept of organizational culture and the importance of building culture was highlighted by many, including Bennis (1989, 1993), Bolman and Deal (1991), Cunningham and Gresso (1993), Deal and Peterson (1991), Hickman and Silva (1984), Peters and Waterman (1982), and Sergiovanni (1990). Bennis' metaphor (1989) of the leader as social architect studying and shaping the "culture of work" pointed to the critical role of the leader as a transformer of others. Bennis' metaphor was reinforced by Murphy and Beck (1994), who specified the need for principals to acknowledge the changing contexts of schooling. Peters and Austin (1985) chose other metaphors for the leader: "cheerleader, enthusiast, nurturer of champions, hero finder, wanderer, dramatist, coach, facilitator, builder" (p. 265), whereas Deal and Peterson selected metaphors for the leader as "symbol, potter, poet, actor and healer" (p. 20).

Cunningham and Gresso (1993) spoke of cultural leadership as essential for excellence and culture-building being the key to organizational success. They stressed that

> the task of leadership is to create and support the culture necessary to foster an attitude of effectiveness in everything that is done within the school. Once this attitude is achieved and supported by the culture, all other aspects of the organization will fall in line. (p. 25)

Values. The importance of culture is reinforced by the significance attached to values in an organization. Sergiovanni's (1990) symbolic leaders assumed the role of "chief" to signal to others what is important and valued in a school. He emphasized moral leadership within value-added leadership.

Moral leadership, according to Foster (1986), is defined in a cultural, professional, and ethical sense, not in a spiritual or religious sense. DePree (1989), a corporate leader, challenged leaders to take a role in developing, expressing, and defending civility and values in their organizations. Smith and Andrews (1989) used as their central theme the moral and ethical obligations of principals.

Greenfield's view of the principal as moral agent cited in Murphy and Beck (1994) addressed the issues of values in education. According to Greenfield, the new science of administration would be a science "with values and of values" (p. 15). Housego (1993) believed that values are in jeopardy in public education and that the challenge for educational leaders is to promote and protect values. He particularly emphasized the importance of the "fraternal" value of community, implying as well cooperation, compassion, and compromise.

Patterson (1993) used systems thinking to shape his concept of leadership. For Patterson, values for tomorrow's leader included openness to employees' active participation in decision making, valuing diversity of perspectives, valuing the healthy resolution of conflict, encouraging reflection on the thinking of self and others, and learning from mistakes. Leading became "*the process of influencing others to achieve mutually agreed upon purposes for the organization*" (p. 3) [italics in original].

Vision. Senge (1990), in describing learning organizations, spoke of the importance of shared vision and team learning, and the role of the leader as designer, steward, and teacher. For him, leaders design the learning processes to help individuals to deal productively with the issues they face, to harness the commitment of the people, and to influence people to view reality at four levels: events, patterns of behavior, systemic structures, and purpose.

Others who specified the importance of visionary leadership include Barth and Pansegrau (1994), Beare (1987), Bennis (1989), Duignan (1987), Duignan and Macpherson (1992), Hickman and Silva (1984), and Peters and Austin (1985). Barth and Pansegrau's image of "growing a vision" and the importance of collaboration and cultivation outlined the importance of the leader being willing to share the vision and take risks in working it through with the group. Barth (1990) affirmed that "leaders need to be able to set general directions and create environments and structures that enable everyone in the school community to discover their own skills and talents and thereby be free to help students discover theirs" (p. 145). Barth has pointed to the principal as head learner, whose job is to point out the cultural values and celebrate learning in the school. Cunningham and Gresso (1993) contended that "school districts that have taken a visionary approach to their future are surviving and prospering" (p. 87).

Trust. The use of metaphors to view leadership is powerful. Greenleaf's (1977) leader-as-servant metaphor pointed to the importance of demonstrating a willingness to serve as providing a legitimacy to lead. The leader, according to Greenleaf, points the direction:

> The one who states the goal must elicit trust, especially if it is a high risk or visionary goal, because those who follow are asked to accept the risk along with the leader. Leaders do not elicit trust unless one has confidence in their values and competence (including judgment) and unless they have a sustaining spirit (entheos) that will support the tenacious pursuit of a goal. (p. 16)

Inspiring similar trust in others, the leader as servant recognizes the importance of the personal dimension in leadership and illustrates the need for both professional expertise and moral leadership.

The term *stewardship* (Sergiovanni, 1992) indicated the trust that is given by people to the leader, enabling him or her to fulfill obligations and perform duties on behalf of others.

Collaboration. With the advent of consultative leadership and site-based management, there has been emphasis on the importance of collaboration. In Leithwood, Begley, and Cousin's (1992) terms, the leader must now be "leading from the back of the band" (p. 6). Leadership responsibilities are to be shared and mutual visions created (Kennedy, 1990). Delegation of responsibility was once a reality; the new norm is shared decision making.

This collaboration must not be only within the culture of the school. The principal, as a person in the community, must enhance his or her public-relations skills. Spanning boundaries and demonstrating collegiality is required, as is celebrating diversity. The advocate role within the cultural community must be modelled by the principal.

Facilitative leadership as defined by Conley and Goldman (1994) required leaders who can lead without dominating and can build the leadership skills of others. Truly facilitative leaders are able to create in their followers a sense of responsibility to participate in solving problems and a belief that they have the capacity to do so. This is more than empowerment; it is shared power. These leaders are transformational leaders. Schlechty (1990) pushed this role further in stating that the primary task of leaders is leadership development.

Questions Remaining

Recent literature has looked at leadership as having multiple emphases. Bolman and Deal (1991, 1993) consolidated organizational thought on leadership by characterizing the various perspectives through which one could view leadership as "frames." They described leader behavior through four frames, the structural, human resource, political, and symbolic. Studies by Bolman and Deal (1992) found that the ability to use multiple frames was critical to principals' effectiveness. They found that effectiveness was strongly associated with a symbolic orientation. Symbolic leaders, according to Owen (1987), enable schools to move from competence to excellence.

Total quality management (TQM) (Bonstingl, 1992; Murgatroyd & Morgan, 1993; Sagor & Barnett, 1994) has also been applied to leadership in public education. TQM stipulates that a clear vision, cultures of quality, integrity, shared decisions, continuous learning, and leaders as coaches are necessary for total quality in schools.

Senge's (1990) learning organization has five disciplines that he contends must converge. Personal mastery within the individual, developing the capacity to work with mental models that are the deeply ingrained assumptions that influence how we view the world, building shared vision of the future, team learning, and systems thinking will enable organizations to achieve success.

Extensive exploration of the concept of leadership has occurred over the past century. Although much has been learned about leaders and leadership, many questions remain unanswered. Much of the writing is exhortatory, a seeming "flavor of the month" approach to the issues of leadership. The changing emphasis in leadership reflects society's pressures and values. The measured output model that has driven the private sector has focused the leader on accountability and results; the cultural model has focused on the community within the organization. Many studies have been done but the definitions are still elusive. Hence there is still much uncertainty if we seek a leadership pattern of actions in general. Is the situation within school leadership similar to that of the business world or does it differ? Does the distinction between the focus on student learning and the focus on economic gain cause leaders to behave differently in schools and in business? How much importance must context be given?

Instructional Leadership

Studies devoted to school leaders have tended to focus on instructional leadership. Although the definitions for instructional leadership vary, if the purpose of schooling is to provide instruction for students, it could be argued that everything done by a principal in a school is working towards improved instruction and learning.

Gorton and McIntyre's (1978) study of 60 effective, exemplary high school principals found that the main factor that characterised these principals was their diversity. The majority were hardworking, dedicated individuals, concerned about students and improving student learning. Pellicer, Anderson, Keefe, Kelley, and McCleary (1990) in the follow-up study collected data from 74 high school principals and visited and wrote case studies for eight schools. The conclusions were that instructional leadership may come from other sources than the principal, but in those schools that were most effective, instructional leadership was a shared responsibility, situational, planned, student centered, risk oriented, and informed.

Dwyer (1986) reported on the Far West Laboratory's year long field study of 32 effective principals which used a variety of data gathering strategies including following principals and categorizing their activities, interviews and anecdotal inquiries. This study identified what principals did to institute and maintain a safe and orderly school climate, to emphasize basic skills, and to monitor that instructional programs and objectives were closely tied. These studies showed that these principals acted with purpose, had a multi-faceted image of their schools, used routine behaviors to progress incrementally toward their goals, engaged in the same kind of behavior but varied their behavior to suit their context and purposes. Peterson (1986) used the data to illustrate four cases of principals' problem finding behaviors, vision, and the problem environment. He looked at clarity of vision and density of problem environment and categorized the diverse roles of the principals as entrepreneur, problem-selector, caretaker, and firefighter. Cuban (1986) analysed the roles of the same four principals as varied combinations of instructional, managerial and political roles. Greenfield (1986) analysed one case study in terms of moral, social, and technical demands of the principalship and suggested that the cultural context of a school had major consequences for leadership.

The extensive studies of instructional leadership have tended to be based on leaders' self-reports. Questionnaires and interviews have been the methodology chosen. Few studies of leaders in action have been done to confirm the results. What is clear is that the role of the principal is a complex one and that providing instructional leadership, by whatever definition, is a challenge. Some studies have explored aspects of this complexity by focusing on the factors affecting instructional leadership or on the functions required.

Factors Affecting Instructional Leadership

Studies of leadership in schools by Leithwood et al. (1992) and Leithwood and Steinbach (1991, 1993) have focused on differentiating between expert and typical principals. Their socio-psychological perspective led Leithwood et al. to conclude in 1992 that

> current school-leaders' practices are influenced by four types of external factors: the principals' role (e.g., expectations, complexity), a large cluster of influences concerning the attitudes, abilities and behaviors of others (e.g., teachers' willingness to innovate), characteristics of the school system (e.g., district policies and procedures), and the principals' own 'background' (e.g., training, socialization experiences). These external factors interact with principals' internal mental processes and states: personal traits (e.g., openmindedness), knowledge and beliefs (e.g., about what is best for students), values (e.g., consequences for students), attitudes and feelings (e.g., job satisfaction), and skills (e.g., problem-solving, conflict management). Through such interactions the specific nature and effectiveness of principals' practices are shaped. (p. 26)

Leithwood (1989) has determined the specific contents of training programs for administrators, in spite of the fact that the research clearly demonstrates that individual situations impact the effectiveness of the principal. Case studies of the principalship (Dwyer, 1986; Lightfoot, 1983; Louis & Miles, 1990; Tye, 1985) illustrate the importance of context in determining the approaches taken by the principal.

Instructional Leadership Functions

In an inservice program to enhance school learning climate and achievement, Brookover et al. (1982), working from a socio-psychological view of leadership, identified activities and functions which instructional leaders must accomplish effectively: instructional objectives, student assessment, school learning-climate assessment, comprehensive planning, efficient use of faculty meetings, concentration on instructional problems, and establishment of a file of objectives. As with much of the effective-schools literature, the list is an arbitrary construction and makes no assessment of the culture of the school itself. This model does not assume the unique nature of each setting and each leader. Leader behaviors as established by Ubben and Hughes (1987) parallel those of Brookover et al. with the addition of instructional strategies.

In an integrated vision of instructional leaders, Duke (1987) identified seven predictable functions which instructional leaders must handle: teacher supervision and development, teacher evaluation, instructional management and support, resource management, quality control, coordination, and troubleshooting. Duke recognized the varying needs and discrete situations within schools and did not prescribe the same actions for all principals.

Krug (1992) established a five-category taxonomy to categorize what principals as instructional leaders do: define mission, manage curriculum and instruction, supervise teachers, monitor student progress, and promote instructional climate. He acknowledged that the context varies for each individual, as do leadership opportunities within each context. From Krug's perspective, "the effective instructional leader is perceived as one who strategically applies knowledge to solve contextually specific problems and to achieve the purposes of schooling through others" (p. 434). The way that leaders interpret the activities, behaviors, and actions determines their effectiveness. Krug reported in his study of 81 principals' perceptions and interpretations of their own activities that it was not what the principals were engaged in that defined effectiveness, but how they approached their work, guided by their own distinctive set of beliefs.

To enable the principal to devote time and expertise to instructional leadership, Drake and Roe (1994) recommended establishing the position of service coordinator at each school to handle the supporting services and business management of the school. This, they contended, would enable principals to carry out effectively the major task of educational improvement without having to attend to the other tasks, a task that is not directly referenced on Krug's list. These changes required for improvement according to Cuban (1990) could be classified as first-order or second-order changes to distinguish between quality control issues and organizational issues.

Much of the research in instructional leadership is repetitive. Much of it seems to be based on a narrow hierarchical formulation of school organization. Structural change is documented in much of the research although Cunningham and Gresso (1993) contend that structural change does not work. Although formulation of effective leadership behaviors has been attempted, most of it has come after the leadership activity has occurred, based on self-reporting. Little emphasis has been placed on watching leaders functioning in schools and asking leaders why they choose the actions that they do. Dwyer (1986) and Barth (1990) have used this approach and Sergiovanni (1991) attempted to do this for illustrative purposes. Alpern's (1986) study looked at cultural change in an inner-city high school and described the role of the principal in this change. Studies of additional principals in action would do much to add to the literature on effective instructional leadership.

There seems to be a similarity in writings on school leadership and on business organizations. Both emphasize culture building, trust, and values. The importance of context is acknowledged. What is missing are descriptions and examinations of the enactment of leadership in schools.

Urban High Schools

Need for Reform

The current reform movement in the United States, and to some extent in Canada, has focused on the need to restructure education because of the dissatisfaction with the public education system as it currently exists. Words such as *chaos* and *crisis* are used to describe the situation in some American schools. Much of the literature, including Adler (1982), Boyer (1983), Ford Foundation (1984), Goodlad (1984), Lightfoot (1983), Louis and Miles (1990), Rothstein (1993), Schlechty (1990), Sizer (1984), and Wilson and Corcoran (1988) began from the premise that there is a widely held negative view of the conditions in and results achieved by public schools. The impetus for this reform movement in the United States arose from the publication of *A Nation at Risk* (1983) by the National Commission of Excellence in Education.

However, Bracey (1991, 1992), Fox (1993), Jaeger (1992), and Rose (1991) disputed the magnitude of the problems within American schools. International comparison data have been used to show that American students are not competitive. Bracey (1991) contended: "American students may or may not stack up well against students from other countries, but, in the studies done to date, the students are not comparable, the curricula are not comparable, the schools are not comparable, and the tests are not comparable" (p. 113). Urgent societal problems plague the United States, but the public schools are not failing to the degree that many have indicated.

Cusick (1992) described the difficulty of resolving issues identified in large urban high schools:

> There is a difference between addressing an issue and eliminating a problem. Matters and issues are addressed; problems persist over the years and throughout the system . . . These problems manifest themselves differently according to situations and time, but they are always present; they always demand attention, and however temporary, demand some resolution. (p. 3)

Uniqueness of Large Urban High Schools

Large urban high schools located within the context of some of the major social problems have been seen in the literature to be unique units, differing from schools at other levels and in other settings. This uniqueness means that different issues face these schools than face the others. The environment of the large city, complete with violence and crime (Callison & Richards-Colocino, 1993; Lutz & Iannaccone, 1993; Williams, 1989), although not often reflected within the schools (Perrone, 1985), has led to the establishment of closed campuses and firm control by staff and administration. Case studies of successful high schools (Ford Foundation, 1984; Lightfoot, 1983; Louis & Miles, 1990; Tye, 1985; Wilson & Corcoran, 1988) have documented the safe, secure, and orderly environment in the high schools studied.

The diversity of purposes and objectives of large urban high schools was seen by Powell, Farrar, and Cohen (1985) in three years of visiting 15 high schools. From their experiences they developed the metaphor of the shopping mall to describe the high school. The variety of course offerings, whether within a subject such as mathematics or over the breadth of courses available; the importance of marketing; the services available at the school; and the varying status of the choices available support this metaphor. Louis and Miles (1990) argued that in urban areas, large high schools "seem more like the dilapidated commercial intersections that dot our inner cities than the chromed, glassy, interior-landscaped versions in suburbia" (p. 3).

The large size of most of the urban high schools make them complex organizationally. John F. Kennedy High School in Lightfoot's 1983 study (p. 58) had 5,300 students in an eight-story structure. Movement of students during the school day as well as to and from school was challenging. A variety of student tracks and the department structure of most urban high schools competed for limited resources. The range of students served by public schools has increased and ability grouping has become necessary as students from the severely handicapped to the academically gifted are being educated at the same site. These organizational problems have tended to cause social divisions within the school as well (Louis & Miles, 1990, p. 9). In 1959 Conant recommended the elimination of small high schools because they were neither cost effective nor able to offer choices to students but large high schools have been associated with the depersonalization of schooling.

Leadership in Large Urban High Schools

Large urban high schools, by necessity, must spread the leadership role to others within the school. Those who support facilitative leadership (Conley & Goldman, 1994) would not see that as an issue, but it does require the principal to empower others. The concept of leadership team was common in many schools studied.

Louis and Miles (1990) saw the significant conflict for the principal not with the sharing of leadership within the school, but with the conflicting requirements from school-district offices. The district, in looking for conformity, did not take the context of individual schools into consideration.

Weeres (1993) identified bureaucratic practices which limited effectiveness. Schlechty (1990), on the other hand, believed that no effective long-term reform can take place without vision and direction from the top. For him the critical question was,

> How can district-level leaders assure that these issues will be addressed in each school building, and how can they assure that the manner in which these issues are addressed will result in schools that produce "better performance by students and more sensible conditions of work for teachers"? (Sizer, 1986, p. 38; cited in Schlechty, p. 234)

Site-based management to allow schools to continue to meet the needs of their communities must, in Schlechty's view, be management by results.

Beckman (1993) identified six roles for an urban principal: organizational leader, authority figure, instructional leader, assessor or evaluator, facilitator, and mediator. Using Total Quality Management, Beckman believed that urban principals can achieve success. Clark and Meloy (1990) went further to suggest that leaders in "new" schools must operate schools on the basis of democracy; group authority and accountability; variability, generality, and interactivity in work assignment; self-discipline and control exercised individually and collectively; and group commitment to and consensus about organizational goals and means.

Case studies of the principalship, including McPherson and Crowson (1994), Prestine (1994), Hallinger and Hausman (1994), and Beck (1994), showed the varied, ambiguous, and uncertain role of the principal. Success for some depended on developing school-community relations and strong management at the school site (McPherson & Crowson); for others it was developing linkages and relationships within the school (Prestine), transformational leadership (Hallinger & Hausman), or cultivating a caring community (Beck). All principals studied were involved in balancing complex responsibilities.

Although many of the case studies have been done with women administrators, the issue of gender has tended not to be the focus. Adkinson (1981) documented the relative absence of women in educational leadership in the United States. Young (1995) reported that in Canada, "while there are some indicators of some women's increased participation in certain administrative roles and contexts, the data that are readily available to us at this time leave many questions unanswered" (p. 246). Rees (1990) surveyed the Canadian scene regarding gender distribution in school systems and outlined the limited involvement of women as leaders in formal positions of leadership.

Ortiz and Marshall (1988), in examining the historical record, outlined four themes which dominate the development of educational administration as a field for men but not for women. They contended that teaching has been a women's profession; administration a man's. The hierarchical structure of schools, the importance of sponsorship in administration, and the management of knowledge in administration have limited the opportunities for women in administration.

Reynolds (1995) grouped the feminist literature into four categories: womanless administration and leadership, women's experiences in leadership and administration, barriers and strategies for women administrators, and reconstructing the discourse of educational administration and leadership. She stressed that more research needed to be completed in all areas. Ortiz and Marshall (1988) reported that studies have consistently reported that women school administrators contribute to higher teacher performance and student achievement. Instructional leadership has been found to be closely aligned with women's educational leadership.

Coursen, Mazzarella, Jeffress, and Hadderman (1989) spoke of myths to account for this widespread discrimination against women in administration including that a woman's place is in the home. The identified obstacles that women face in achieving administrative positions and in maintaining administrative positions were consistent with Ortiz and Marshall's (1988) discussion. Experiences of women in administration have been documented by researchers including Baudoux (1995), Gill (1995), Rees (1995), Reynolds (1995), and Taylor (1995).

Another piece that was considered in the discussion of women in administration is the socialization that women have undergone, learning to play the role of the subordinate (Ferguson, 1994). The role of female as supportive, attentive to others and caring has been contrasted with the role of males as analytical, rational, competitive. Caring has been seen in opposition to justice. Ethics have been based on justice for men, not caring; and the "feminizing" of leadership is seen by some to be emotional and fluffy. The question for Gilligan (1977) was whether schools should emphasize and enforce rules over caring and helping.

Effectiveness in Large Urban High Schools

The complexities of high schools led Firestone and Herriot (1982) to suggest that effective secondary schools differed from effective elementary schools and that the criteria used to judge effectiveness differed. They found that high schools had less consensus about goals, fewer formal rules, greater teacher autonomy, less influence by the principal over policy, less communication among staff members, and more administrator-teacher conflict. Leithwood et al. (1992), and Murphy and Hallinger (1985) also identified characteristics common to effective high schools as compared with effective elementary schools which focused on the broader range of goals and the importance of a sense of community.

Studies of successful large urban high schools have been done in order to recognize effective performance (Ford Foundation, 1984; Perrone & Associates, 1985; Wilson & Corcoran, 1988). Schools in these studies have nominated themselves for consideration. Other studies, including Lightfoot (1983), Louis and Miles (1990), Powell et al. (1985), and Tye (1985), have been conducted in schools selected by the researchers. Autonomy or school-site management was identified as critical for all large urban high schools (Slater, 1993); leadership was becoming transformational (Leithwood et al., 1992) or adaptive (Louis & Miles) as staff were empowered to act. Instructional leadership in the form of goal setting and visioning (Lightfoot; Louis & Miles; Perrone & Associates; Sizer, 1992; and Wilson & Corcoran) was required by the principal, although matching leadership style to the culture of the school was important (Lightfoot; Louis & Miles). Clear goals and high expectations were identified in all successful schools studied. The principal was seen to be vital to the success of the schools. The blueprint for change for large urban high schools (Sizer) included these components.

The challenges within in a large urban high school are many. The literature suggested that large urban high schools have features that are not shared by other schools. However, as in other schools, the principal is a critical factor in effective urban high schools.

Canadian Situation

The quality of education for young people in Canada has also received much attention. Relationships among the national economy, the quality of life for Canadians, and the education of the next generation were first broached in the Corporate Higher Education Forum paper in 1990, followed by references to students at risk by the Minister of State for Youth in 1991, Prime Minister Mulroney's throne speech delivered in 1991, the Prosperity Initiative working paper in 1992, and the 1992 Economic Council of Canada pamphlet *A Lot to Learn*.

The federal government also launched a stay-in-school initiative in 1990. Following three years of funding, the policy makers, unable to sustain funding, sought more information about those secondary schools which were successful in retaining and graduating students. EIC (Human Resources, Canada) approached the Canadian Educational Association (CEA) in September 1992 to convene a seminar on approaches to a national study of secondary schools. Subsequently, the CEA and EIC put together a team of academic researchers to study exemplary secondary schools. The results of this study were released in late August 1995.

Provincially, commissions on education were held in six provinces. Provincial ministers of educations became involved in the National Indicators Project in response to international test comparisons that were showing Canadian students to be less than competitive.

Many of the trends which have been evident in Canadian school districts parallel the reform movement in the United States. Manzer (1994) identified trends including a move from streaming students to inclusiveness, a move to testing by means of standardized tests or external examinations, a move back to content centred curriculum, and less emphasis on special needs, minority groups, and religious or aboriginal concerns.

Krug and Peart (1990) reviewed the result of various Canadian research studies and summarized the outcomes identified with a good school. As a parallel to Lightfoot's (1983) work, *The Good School* identified elements of school atmosphere and achievement which produced those outcomes. These works both pointed out the limited utility of generalizing the findings when taken out of context.

Public education since 1990 has been high on the public agenda. Many of the critics have become self-proclaimed experts on learning and schooling. An Alberta radiologist, Dr. J. Freedman, through his lobbying, convinced Alberta Education and the Alberta Chamber of Resources to undertake a project in 1990, *International Comparisons in Education: Curriculum, Values, and Lessons* (1992), which demonstrated that Alberta students were not achieving at a level that would make them competitive internationally. The study, sponsored by major corporations, concluded by listing recommendations for stakeholder partnerships, for business, for educators and for educational policy makers.

The tone of the criticism is reflected in the titles of some of the recent Canadian books: Nikiforuk's (1993) *School's Out: The Catastrophe in Public Education and What We Can Do About It;* Lewington and Orpwood's (1993) *Overdue Assignment: Taking Responsibility for Canada's Schools;* Contenta's (1993) *Rituals of Failure: What Schools Really Teach;* and Emberley and Newell's (1994) *Bankrupt Education: The Decline of Liberal Education in Canada.* Barlow and Robertson's (1994) *Class Warfare: The Assault on Canada's Schools* is one title which defends public education.

Education is being blamed in these writings for many things, including the ills of the Canadian economy. The federal government has instituted stay in school programs to address economic issues related to drop-out rates and has provided funding for vocational education and post-secondary programs. Business and government seem to believe that education will solve everything and are attempting to determine the educational agenda in order to fix the economic picture. These issues are reflected in each school community and have provided a context for this study.

Conclusion

The literature on leadership in general and school leadership in particular has stressed the importance of working within a culture, of having a vision based on values and sharing it with others who share a similar ethos or who are empowered to achieve shared goals. Trust, collaboration and professional growth are stressed and competition, hierarchy and rules are minimized. What is missing from the literature is how principals achieve this in large urban schools where student diversity, teacher autonomy and a shopping mall mentality may be the most evident features and where an economic recession has placed renewed emphasis on narrower educational goals of academic achievement or vocational success. In the studies of urban high schools, the leader is seen to be important for the success of the school, and some of the studies documented some of the actions of the principals. There are silences about the actions of the urban high school principal related to the school goals and how the principal interprets his or her acts, silences which this study has attempted to address.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

Philosophical Stance

The study was completed within the interpretivist paradigm (Burrell & Morgan, 1979). Using this research stance required making a series of assumptions. These assumptions are related to views about multiple realities and understandings, differing values being integral to understanding, the influence of the researcher on the researched, actions being based on choice, and a focus on understandings rather than generalizations.

Multiple Realities

One of the orientations of this interpretivist research stance was an assumption about the nature of reality. Within this paradigm

> there are multiple, intangible realities which can be studied only holistically (to dissociate the wholes is to alter them radically); inquiry into these multiple realities will inevitably diverge (each inquiry raises more questions than it answers) so that prediction and control are unlikely outcomes, although some level of understanding (*verstehen*) can be achieved. (Guba & Lincoln, 1982, pp. 237-238)

I assumed that there would be multiple realities and understandings held by the various participants in the study. I spent several months in one school observing firsthand the actions of one effective high school principal. The study tells her story. Being a part of the setting for an extended period of time allowed me to share the experiences of the school and write about the reality of the principal as explained by the principal herself.

I also had the opportunity to speak with others in the school, encouraging them to share their perceptions of the school and the principal. My goal was to understand the school and the principal through understanding the varied realities of the staff, students, and parents. Several of the documents produced by the school and the principal were reviewed to give me further information. I expected to have different interpretations for various experiences shared by staff, students, and parents. This, too, was included in the study. Greenfield and Ribbins (1993) argued that research should look at reality from a variety of perspectives.

I wanted to know what happened within the school and how things happened. I had the opportunity to examine events as they unfolded and developed which added to my understanding. I wanted to discover what this high school principal chose to do and how she interpreted and made meanings of her actions, and how those actions tied into her overall goals for the school. The reflections that she shared with me were invaluable in coming to an empathetic understanding of her and the school (Patton, 1987). The comments of others enriched my understanding.

The pilot study gave me the opportunity to see a second high school, and it became clear that each of the schools was a unique setting and that each of the principals saw the world somewhat differently. The actions of these principals both influenced and were influenced by the cultures of the schools. Owens (1982) explained that

> if one seeks to understand the realities of human organizations and the behavior of people in them, the naturalistic view would hold that those organizations must be examined in all the rich confusion of their daily existence. Human behavior must be studied *in situ* if it is to be understood. (p. 6)

Differing Values

Differing values are integral to gaining understanding. Guba and Lincoln (1982) contended that "inquiry is always value-bound" (p. 238). They further explained that "inquiry is inevitably grounded in the value systems that characterize the inquirer, the respondent, the paradigm chosen, the methods selected, and the social and conceptual contexts" (p. 242).

My own values influenced the study, particularly in the way I framed the original questions and selected the research paradigm. The strategies for data gathering were also influenced by values as was what I saw when collecting the data.

I also assumed that within the context of the school there would be a set of values to which participants formally adhered. Individuals within the school, I assumed, would have differing values as well. I expected to find individuals who shared the values of the principal as well as those who were critical.

In selecting the participants in the study, I endeavored to ensure that the inquiry would be value resonant. I believed that the two principals shared similar values about learning and schooling. No conclusions were predetermined before the data were gathered.

One of the things that continually was reinforced for me was that I did not see the experiences through the same eyes as the principal. Throughout the study, I became more aware of my individual values and interpretations. As I continued to involve myself in school life, I became better able to select the right questions to ask to discover the principal's meanings and values and the meanings and values of others. I tried not to impose my values on the principal's leadership, although I found that our beliefs were more similar than different.

Observer-Observed Relationship

Based on the interpretivist paradigm, I assumed that in the conduct of this study the two principals and I would influence each other. Owens (1982) contended that "it is illusory to suppose that interaction between inquirer and subject might be eliminated. Indeed, this dynamic relationship can make it practicable for the inquirer, himself or herself, to become the data-gathering and processing 'transducer'" (p. 6).

I came to the study as a trusted colleague. This opened doors for me that would not have been opened to other researchers. Because of this pre-established trust, and because of the principal's natural inclination to teach, I benefitted greatly from this study. Others may not have found the same candor from the principal and staff.

Although I observed individual "bits" in the life of this high school principal, I tried to focus in a holistic way (Everhart, 1988). I saw the start of many situations and was able to pick them up again as they progressed. If I was not actually a part of the experience, the principal kept me apprised of developments. Even after I had completed gathering the data, when we saw each other I found myself wanting to know how something had concluded.

Our conversations when I asked her to explain her meaning for actions filled in many of the blanks for me. I "lived" with the principal for a limited period of time but I felt that I was able to get a holistic sense of this person as a leader.

Not only was she a fine coach and mentor in her school, but she provided me with opportunities to learn as well. She helped me to appreciate the richness of what I was observing. The interactivity between us enabled me to "hone in on relevant facts and ideas by virtue of [my] sensitivity, responsiveness, and adaptability" (Guba & Lincoln, 1982, p. 240).

Actions Based on Choice

I assumed that the principal's actions were based on choice and were not "caused" by some outside influence. As Guba and Lincoln (1982) suggested: "Action can be understood not as having been caused but as having emerged from the constant interplay of its shapers, all of which are themselves part of the action, indistinguishable from it, and shaping and being shaped simultaneously" (p. 242).

I assumed that these actions I witnessed were purposive and that my research task was to come "to understand and interpret how the various participants in a social setting construct the world around them" (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992, p. 6). My interest was in understanding the actions of one principal and how those actions were tied into her overall goals for the school.

The principal had an incredible background of experience which she used in her day-to-day decisions. Through my observations and my participation, she described the impact of these experiences as I shared her "lived experiences." I have constructed the principal's story from these experiences and explanations and share it with the reader.

Nature-of-Truth Statements

The intention of this research stance was not to draw generalizations. This study was descriptive; it was intended to provide an understanding of one principal, in one setting, at one point in time. Guba and Lincoln (1982) indicated that "it is doubtful whether generalizations can be made about human behavior with impunity" (p. 241). That is not to say that there cannot be transfer from this situation to another, but time and context must be considered. As researcher, I was concerned "first with developing an adequate idiographic statement about the situation [I was] studying, accompanied by sufficient 'thick description' to make judgements about transferability possible, should anyone care to ask that question" (p. 241).

Selection of Participants

Two principals who were recognized as effective high school instructional leaders were involved in the study.

I used purposive sampling to ensure that I was able to gather information-rich data from those with demonstrated expertise. The selection of the principals was made in my own district from my own knowledge, and in consultation with the associate superintendents who supervised the principals. I began by meeting individually with the associate superintendents, outlining the purpose of my study and the understandings I hoped to gain. With their assistance, two principals were chosen. Both of these individuals have had extensive administrative experience and have held a variety of positions within the district. Both have held senior staff positions within the district during their careers.

The criteria used to select these people also included the success of their schools in meeting the priorities set by the Board of Trustees, and the principals' results relative to the district's Management Purposes, which include student performance, student attitudes, staff performance, staff attitudes, parent and community attitudes, facilities, and finances.

Initially, I had planned to observe and focus on both principals but soon found the task too complex. I redesigned the study to observe and focus on one of them and include insights from both. Hence, I had the opportunity to discuss my observations with both of them: one as the focus of the research, the other as co-researcher and focus for my pilot study.

I selected to shadow Shirley Stiles, principal of Jasper Place High School, Edmonton, Alberta, over an extended period of time, while she provided leadership in the school. The nature and purpose of the principal's interactions, the participants involved, and the format of her daily activities were the foci of my observations. Discussion with Shirley provided an opportunity for her to reflect on the observations I had made. I also met formally and informally with other members of the leadership team—teachers, support staff, custodians, students, and parents—to understand their perspective on the leadership in the school. I spoke with anyone who was willing to speak with me. Communications prepared by the principal were reviewed to provide another source of information.

The second effective high school principal had a different role. I did a limited pilot study with this individual at his high school, to hone my own skills and gather preliminary observations. He served as a sounding board for me to discuss the issues I observed in the primary setting. He was a peer reviewer, sharing how the particular actions and issues would have been dealt with in another setting and helping me to determine if the issues were common in both settings. This principal was a co-researcher. His questions were as insightful as his answers. I found that although his leadership was different in some respects from Shirley's, he had many of the same skills that made both schools run smoothly.

Before the study formally began, I spoke with both principals, inviting their participation. Both were enthusiastic about becoming involved. When I discussed the project with Shirley Stiles, we agreed that naming Shirley and the school would be an appropriate way to acknowledge her involvement and the involvement of the school. Shirley had been studied often by researchers, and this would be an opportunity to acknowledge publicly her leadership and the success of her school.

Research Design

I gathered the data in three phases. In the first term I sought permission to do the study with Shirley at Jasper Place. I conducted my pilot study with the second principal. Then I visited the school about once every two weeks, meeting with Shirley and gathering printed information. In this way the staff were used to my presence when I spent almost every day there in the second semester. Three or four days a week I could be found either with Shirley Stiles or around the school speaking with staff, students, or parents. One of the interviews with one of the parents was carried out in her home one morning.

My initial visits were spent with Shirley to get a sense of how she intended to spend her day and what issues were major. From the first day I spoke informally to many people, but the taped interviews with staff, students, and parents did not start until I had been at the school for over a month.

On a daily basis I reviewed my data so that I was able to confirm and enhance my understanding on the next visit. Owens (1982) indicated that "normally, the research strategy will provide for a rather broad-scale exploration at the outset that is simultaneously accompanied by checking for accuracy, seeking verification, testing, probing, and confirming as the data collection proceeds" (p. 11). Shirley became accustomed to my beginning the day by saying: "Tell me more about . . . ." She was the only person at Jasper Place who spent much time revisiting issues with me.

After the first three weeks I made a visit to the second principal. During an evening at his school, we spent several hours talking about what I had seen and reflecting on the meaning of some of my observations. These visits continued about every three weeks throughout the research, and he was the first to see my initial drafts.

He and Shirley spoke regularly of the project as they met at meetings or spoke on the telephone. He was interested to learn about her actions and reflections and valued his involvement in the study. Although I met with both individually and they spoke with each other, we did not have an opportunity for the three of us to meet as a group.

During phase three, I again visited the school on a less regular schedule. When the first draft of the study was complete, a copy was given to both principals. They had the opportunity to discuss their reactions with me and to add suggestions. Others who participated in the study had the opportunity to meet with me at Jasper Place to review what I had included from their comments. I booked one of the conference rooms for a day and invited them to drop by. Although several reviewed their sections in the study and some cosmetic changes were requested, no substantive changes were made.

Pilot Study

Before I began at Jasper Place, I conducted a pilot study with the second principal. We began with a meeting at the school to discuss the plans for my involvement at the school. I spent several days at the school, shadowing him and discussing my observations with him. He spent much of his time walking about the school, and we had an ongoing conversation during our walks. He conducted assemblies and taught his social studies class while I observed. I also had the opportunity to speak with the assistant principal and five of the department heads. I attended meetings of the professional development committee after school as well.

I found the opportunity to practice observing and asking questions to be helpful. He was skilled at bringing things to my attention, issues upon which I had not commented. He was also interested in knowing my thoughts about issues faced in the school.

The other members of his leadership team with whom I spoke were very open and willing to share their thoughts and interpretations. As with the staff at Jasper Place, I already knew five of the six members of his leadership team and several of the teachers.

The pilot study opened my eyes to the complexities of observation and questioning. I found that I had to sharpen my observation skills and note things to discuss at a later time. My pilot study let me know how effective I was at noticing the environment and the activity. For example, as I began my pilot study I was not focusing on the cleanliness of the hallways. I soon came to realize that the principal and staff were modelling keeping the school tidy by picking up paper as they walked about. Some of the students were also assisting. This became significant when I found that there was only one custodian in the building. This had been a cost-saving measure, but the cleanliness of the building had not suffered as a result.

While I was at the pilot school the principal made some invaluable suggestions and observations that assisted me in my study. He pointed out issues such as his concern with the members of a particular cultural group. The Radio Club had been formed to provide these young men with a positive focus for their energy. He provided me with plenty of time to discuss my observations and gave me many insights as we talked. It became clear that much of what he chose to do on a daily basis was designed to ensure that the school was a safe learning environment for all students.

He later provided me with opportunities for discussion about my observations at Jasper Place and shared his interpretation of the actions and issues I observed. He described how he addressed similar issues at his school. "Peer consultation provides opportunities while the inquiry is still in progress to check one's thinking, to raise questions and concerns, and to talk through problems of which the investigator may or may not be aware" (Owens, 1982, p. 9). This principal was my peer consultant.

I was also pleased to be invited to participate one evening in the work on his school budget for 1995-96. I had an opportunity to work in small groups with some of his staff and add my thoughts to the planning of their next year.

Entry to the Site

I first spoke with Shirley in the fall, meeting with her to describe the nature of my study. The casual visits to the school in the first semester gave me a sense of the school and the challenges Shirley faced. In the first month we spoke several times as I refined my thoughts and she provided me with her views about the study.

Before I began data collection at Jasper Place, with the permission of the school district and the principal, I spoke to the staff at their monthly staff meeting. I explained the purpose of my study and invited their involvement. I told them that Shirley had agreed to being named and to the use of the school name, but I also needed their permission. I indicated that, if there were those who did not believe that I should name the school and the principal, they should speak with me and it would not be done. Whereas no one spoke against naming the school and the principal, six individuals actively supported my suggestion. All participants other than Shirley were assured confidentiality in terms of their comments and were reminded that they were free to discontinue their participation at any time. I have used first names of the assistant principals and head secretary on a few occasions when it seemed necessary for the continuity of the story. This was done with permission. Students' first names appear occasionally as well, but they have not been described in any way that would lead to their identification.

Data Gathering

Having chosen a qualitative approach for my study, the major data gathering strategies were observations, reflective conversations based on observations, informal interviews, and document analyses.

Following the completion of the pilot study, I began data gathering in the school's second semester. I spent much of the term at the school, shadowing the principal, observing, and talking with other staff, students, and parents. I participated in meetings and special activities. My schedule was flexible, and I found that toward the end of the second semester I had collected sufficient rich information to complete my initial data gathering. I found that most of the issues I was observing fit within the range of issues I had already observed. During May and June several phone calls and informal visits followed because I had "just one more question." As I spoke with Shirley while I was writing my drafts, I found that other information was provided as follow-up to some of the issues I had observed. Owens (1982) suggested that "time immersed in the situation is important" (p. 14).

I felt confident when the data collection was completed that I had an understanding of Shirley and her school. Shirley also provided feedback to my initial drafts.

Shadowing, Observing

I shadowed the principal during the initial portion of my stay at the school. When I arrived at the school each morning, I joined her in her office to begin the day. Depending on the nature of her activity, my shadowing differed. If she began by a walk through the hallway, I walked with her and we chatted as we walked. I echoed her greetings to staff and students but did not actively involve myself in conversation with others unless they spoke to me first. If an individual came up to speak with her, I stepped back a few paces and listened but did not participate.

When we were in her office, I sat in a chair at her table and tried to be a nonparticipant. This was possible in most situations because Shirley has had a large number of university students and visitors in the school, and most of the staff were used to seeing strangers around. I positioned myself a little further from the table than normal and had a notebook on my lap. I sat so that I could observe both Shirley and her visitors.

When someone whom I did not know came into the office, she always introduced me and explained my purpose. In sensitive situations the individuals were asked if they minded if I was there. No one ever said that they were worried by my presence. However, in one situation in which staff from one of the departments were dissatisfied with the department head, Shirley asked that I not sit in on those interviews. I knew the department head and several of the staff and Shirley felt that my presence might inhibit them. I agreed. However, Shirley outlined the problem and the discussion even though I was not a part of the actual discussions.

On several occasions those who were meeting with Shirley included me in their comments, although I was reluctant to participate. To avoid being included I always kept my notebook in front of me and made notations as each person spoke. It seemed that some of the people felt compelled to be polite and involve me, even though I had no role to play. Meetings of the administrative team were similar. Because I knew each of them prior to my study, I would occasionally be included in the beginning during the social portions of the meetings.

As the weeks passed, I found that my observations varied. I became more insightful about situations. Owens (1982) contended that "time is essential to permit the researcher to shift from predispositions, through early impressions, to a deeper level of understanding" (p. 14).

Reflective Conversation

During the day, when time was available, I engaged the principal in reflective conversation in her office. My intention was to explore and understand the principal's view of the significance of the actions I had observed. This part of my study was tape-recorded and transcribed. My portable tape-recorder was a blessing because it fitted comfortably on her table and picked up every word, so that I was able to focus on the conversation.

I planned strategies for engaging the principal in conversation about her actions, but I also found that it was important to be flexible and to use the opportunities for discussion that arose. It was the principal's story that I wanted, not my story, although I recognized that it was impossible to eliminate one participant in a dialogue.

Each evening I reviewed the day's events and noted questions and issues that I wanted to raise the next day. Owens (1982) contended that the investigator "continuously corroborates data, information, and perceptions with relevant others in the organization being studied" (p. 15). This was done on a daily basis.

Conversations with Staff, Students, and Parents

No one to whom I spoke declined to participate, and although I was aware of it as a possibility, no one avoided talking to me, even informally. Every day there were times when I was not with Shirley and was able to speak with staff informally in the staff cafeteria or around the school.

I kept my eyes and ears open as I wandered around. My presence was intrusive initially, but over time I became less of a novelty and more of a fixture. Some of the staff were people whom I knew from other settings, and soon most of the staff were calling me by name as we passed each other. I felt very comfortable as I pursued the story.

Later in the term I scheduled individual meetings with the members of the administrative team, the department heads, several teachers, support staff, the custodian, and the police resource officer. Several Grade 12 students responded to my invitation to talk, and parents suggested by Shirley met with me to add to the story.

I recorded these informal interviews with the staff, students, and parents. Those tapes were transcribed as well. Although I offered to provide them, no one wanted to see the transcriptions, but I did offer to meet with each person whose comments I used, to verify that I had not misrepresented them in my editing of their words. No substantive changes were required.

Document Analysis

I asked the principal to provide me with copies of documents that she had created. The collection I was given included the staff handbook, weekly memos to staff, the Grade 9 registration guide, newsletters, copies of articles she had written, and brochures prepared to support community involvement. I was also given a few letters that had been sent to the school. I was given a copy of the school's 1995-96 budget as well. If I asked to have anything in print, it was provided immediately. For example, I requested that the format of one of their charts that I expected to use in the study be changed and a copy given to me. There was no hesitation in providing it. I believe I gained additional insight about the principal's philosophy from these written materials.

Field Notes

I wrote field notes as well during my time in the school. Most of the notes were reminders to myself about follow-up questions, the tone of the conversation, or important names or issues. My notebook was with me throughout the day, although I found that many of my notations were a form of shorthand to myself.

Each evening I brainstormed all the significant things I could think of to keep an eye on the next day. I reviewed information and notes, listened to sections of the audio tapes, and added explanatory comments or more details of situations that I did not have time to write up on-site.

Data Analysis

Each day of my study I set aside time immediately following my visit to write in my journal and reflect on the day's happenings. For the first few weeks I had my observations, field notes, and documents to analyse. I listened to any tapes from the day and noted any questions, thoughts, insights, and frustrations I felt. I then sent the tapes for transcription.

My former secretary transcribed the tapes for me. I gave them to her regularly, and she did the transcripts speedily. She was most efficient and simplified my life greatly. I had confidence in her understanding of the importance of confidentiality and confirmed with her the importance of being able to maintain it. I also appreciated her reactions to the tapes. When we met to exchange tapes, she often provided me with her observations about the contents. She put a different interpretation on some of the actions and issues which I had not considered. As a former district employee, she had a context for the tapes which a stranger would not have had.

Although initially I used my observation and field-note data and the documents to reflect, when the transcriptions were given to me, I read them to review, explore, and understand the ideas expressed. My first analyses of the transcriptions were to look for missing probes or identify extensions of information that I needed.

On further reviews of the transcriptions, I checked the transcriptions for accuracy and began to note my thoughts in the margins. This was my first attempt at coding. I listened to each tape many times, reviewing the printed page each time. The margins of the pages soon became full of comments. I made no attempt to preselect categories; I wanted the units to be heuristic, to provide an understanding of the pattern of the principal's understanding. I did notice that some extended pieces of some interviews seemed to add nothing to the story but were important in sustaining the conversation, whereas other pieces were incredibly rich. I also found that some of the passages became richer as I thought about them.

Through my continuous review of the sources of my data, my observations, field notes, documents, and tape transcriptions, I tried to come to a deep understanding of what I had collected. Eventually I saw that the data could be categorized into four major headings: philosophy, relationships, practices, and programs. Further reflections during the writing-up of the categories led me to the discovery of themes and the identification of a metaphor to aid my understanding.

Trustworthiness of the Findings

Trustworthiness. Triangulation (Guba & Lincoln, 1982; Merriam, 1988; Miles & Huberman, 1984) is a strategy suggested to ensure that the data are trustworthy or internally valid. Although I planned to use observation, conversation, and documents to gather information, my purpose in doing so was not to triangulate. I was not looking for consistency in the three data sources; I was looking for greater understanding. However, as I analysed my data sources, I realized that they had internal validity. All sources of data gave consistent messages.

Confidence in the trustworthiness of my data was also confirmed by giving both principals the opportunity to review the first draft of the study. Their comments were valuable. In particular, Shirley was able to provide the resolution for issues that were not concluded while I was at the school. For instance, she told me that the sports-medicine facility had been approved, something that had been in the planning stages while I was there.

Dependability. I maintained my contact with the principal for a long enough period of time that I am confident that I have an understanding of her world. When the visits seemed to yield no new information and became redundant, I determined that the data I had gathered were dependable. I tried to monitor my own biases and assumptions, and my conversations with both of the principals enabled me to check my perceptions with them. I have had wide experience in schools, and I ultimately trusted my judgment.

Until I had spent time with the principal, I did not anticipate what I would discover. The principal's actions were what I wanted to observe, and the principal's story was what I wanted to tell. But there were emerging patterns that provided a rich narrative. I wrote description interspersed with stories.

The findings from this study are reasonable in the context of a large urban high school in 1995. Each issue at Jasper Place had previously been identified in the literature on large urban high schools. The second principal was helpful in confirming that issues at Jasper Place were relevant issues at his school. As Owens (1982) suggested: "Judgments and conclusions in the report should be demonstrably reasonable, meaning that they are well connected to the evidence and supportable by a carefully maintained audit trail" (p. 14). My audit trail has been maintained and included tapes, transcripts, journal notes and documents.

Credibility. Is the story credible? Owens (1982) pointed out that because naturalistic research is an interactive process, "data collection and analysis go on simultaneously, with the analysis giving direction to the data collection by suggesting what to check, when to seek confirmation, and how to extend the data collection itself" (p. 11). I have relied on both principals to confirm the credibility of my analysis. Owens' use of the funnel image to check for verification was helpful.

I have left an audit trail of all the notes I took, my journal, the tapes and their transcriptions, and the documents I collected. Owens (1982) maintained that

> the existence of a carefully-documented audit trail makes it possible to do two important things: (1) to examine the procedures of the study, either while it is in progress or after the fact, in order to verify its consistency and credibility by independent external auditors, and (2) to make it possible to reproduce the study at another time. (p. 13)

Working with the second principal provided another process of verification of the credibility and dependability of the data. The other principal read the study to see that it made sense and that any findings resonated from my data. Member checks with all participants also confirmed credibility.

Transferability. Any conclusions that may be drawn from this study arise from the data I have collected and analysed. I did not intend to draw generalizations; however, I hope readers will be able to gain insights about high school leadership. In Guba and Lincoln's (1981) terms, the reader has the burden of synthesis. I have tried to provide enough of the context to assist the reader in understanding the situations in which the principal acted and the choices the principal made as she moved toward her overall goals for the school. My goal has been

> thick description, by which is meant providing enough information about a context, first, to impart a vicarious experience of it, and second, to facilitate judgments about the extent to which working hypotheses from that context might be transferable to a second and similar context. (Guba & Lincoln, 1982, p. 248)

Ethical Considerations

There were a number of ethical considerations to be addressed before this research began, including the issues of freedom, bias, position power, and the use of names. There were also some ethical dilemmas as I reviewed the data I had gathered.

The Issue of Freedom

This study was done in my own district. This required me to be particularly sensitive to the freedom provided potential participants. Because of my position within the district, it may be perceived that I coerced principals to participate in my study. The principals were fully knowledgeable that I had invited their participation and that I did not expect them to be a part of the study if they chose not to be involved. Should they have expressed any hesitation, I would not have pressured them to agree to participate.

All staff at Jasper Place were invited to participate. I spoke with them at a staff meeting, outlining my plan and indicating that they were not obliged to speak with me if they did not wish to participate. I indicated that I would like to speak to some in a more structured setting, but that I hoped to have the opportunity to meet many of them informally. They were assured of confidentiality with any of their comments.

The Issue of Bias

Because the study took place in my own district, I knew and was known by the two principals. All of us had held positions in senior administration; however, neither of the two was in a position of senior administration at a time when I was. I had never supervised either of the principals, but we were known to each other. Both had excellent reputations, and based on my knowledge of their work, I knew that their philosophical orientations were similar to my own. We did not know each other well; rather, we respected each other as colleagues.

The district is large, with over 75,000 students, 200 schools, and at that time approximately 16 senior staff positions. One of the principals had held a senior staff position identical to the position that I had held; the other had not.

Because of our previous knowledge, trust developed early. Each of us knew that it was essential to be open and honest and that we could count on each other's integrity. Both principals were pleased that they had the opportunity to work with me on a study which would enhance the understanding of all of us. From my first phone call, both were interested in the project. Both understood the purpose of my study, were given the opportunity to withdraw at any time, and were given drafts of my writing to review.

The opportunity to document Shirley's leadership and acknowledge the school was seen to be positive by both participating principals.

The Issue of Position Power

The staff at Jasper Place were conscious of who I was. They may have felt that they wanted to put the school and the principal in a particular light to advance their own case. However, having taught with and been an administrator with a number of the staff meant that evidence of my reputation as a committed educator who had integrity and humor was available to those who wished to find out.

Further, the restructuring of the district that was happening while I was on leave meant that I would not be going back to my previous position and would probably be returning to a school.

The Use of Names

During initial discussions, Shirley Stiles and I spoke about the possibility of using her name and the name of the school in the study. Over the years she has had many students from the university shadowing her and writing about her anonymously. We spoke of the opportunity to document what a person with an excellent reputation does to provide leadership in a school. Shirley agreed that it would be an opportunity for the school to be acknowledged. She was not concerned that I would write anything that would be harmful to individuals in the school. Shirley agreed at the outset to the use of names; however, we decided that if something arose that was too sensitive, or if any member of staff objected, the names would be changed and the participants would be anonymous. Everything I had heard about Shirley's exemplary leadership led me to believe that she would want the findings of the study to be equally honest about the situations that were successfully resolved and those as those that were not so well resolved.

When I spoke to the staff at the first staff meeting, I told them that Shirley had agreed to being named and to the use of the school name, but that I also needed their permission. No one objected. I also explained that their comments would be confidential and that I would provide copies of transcriptions to anyone who was taped by me. No one wanted transcriptions. However, several did review sections of the first draft which contained their comments.

Ethical Dilemmas

I was prepared to deal with ethical dilemmas in the data gathering. Knowing that the name of the school and the principal might be included in the study made me seriously consider including anything that had potential to cause harm to the participants. One of the things that I found somewhat difficult was the discussion of the group expulsion. By avoiding specifics, I could include enough information to give the richness of the story without compromising confidentiality. Inclusion of all information of a sensitive nature was discussed with the principal before it was included. I tried to write any such parts of the story in a way that allowed the inclusion of a sensitive passage without identifying its source. However, I have endeavored to be as honest as I could be in rendering the story.

CHAPTER 4

THE FINDINGS

Based on the data that were gathered and analysed, the findings of the study were woven together. This chapter begins with my own introduction to the school and introduces the historical context of the setting and the respondents. Four major categories follow: philosophy and beliefs, people and relationships, practices, and programs. A section on Shirley Stiles as a person concludes the chapter.

First Impressions

Although I had driven by Jasper Place High School scores of times in the past, I had never studied the façade. On a cold, dark December morning I made my first "official" visit. As I slowly drove south on 163rd Street, all I could think was how institutional the building looked: two rows of identical windows along an expanse of grey-white concrete. The flags flying outside let me know that the building could have been a hospital, a school, or a jail. When I saw the crowd of young people, I knew everyone would recognize it as a high school. Hordes of teenagers jaywalked or wandered in the parking lot out front, their uniform of baseball caps, black shoes, and jeans consistent throughout. Although I understood how people not used to teenagers could find going into the school somewhat intimidating, I was looking forward to beginning my study. I knew it would be exciting.

Historical Context

The Facility

Jasper Place High School was opened in 1960 by the town of Jasper Place. When Jasper Place amalgamated with Edmonton, the school joined Edmonton Public Schools. The building is in three attached but seemingly separate wings. Two additions to the school have resulted in its being one of the largest school buildings in the district. The principal said, somewhat tongue in cheek, "We have an enormous plant which was built in three sections by three architects who never spoke to each other. Nothing matches."

There are two two-storey wings; one forms the main facade facing 163rd Street, the other two-storey wing faces the playing field to the west. As well, a six-storey tower is attached to the western wing and houses the library, the office area, and classrooms. A maze of hallways connect the wings, and a covered walkway outside connects the east wing with the tower. It was a challenge to become familiar with the setting.

The school contains three gymnasia, three computer laboratories, a fitness and weight-training facility, and a wide range of Career and Technology (CTS) laboratories, including a newly renovated cosmetology lab. A stadium with track, arena, and pool are adjacent to the main building, which, together with playing fields and tennis courts, make for a school that has the facilities to provide a comprehensive program.

One of the wings of the school also contains a privately run daycare where children from age 19 months to kindergarten are served. Other spaces in the school are occupied by the probation officer from the Attorney General's Department, the dietetics program of the city's hospitals, and the Alberta Crafts Council; and negotiations are currently underway to lease space to Dr. Randy Gregg and his sports-medicine clinic. A significant amount of space is currently unused in the school.

History of the School

The student population at the school peaked in 1971 when it reached 2,507 students. For the 1994-95 school year the enrolment was 1,840 students. Eighty-eight teaching staff were employed. In addition to classroom teachers, the principal, three assistant principals, and five department heads were on the staff. There were an additional forty-three support staff and custodians. As well, the school had a full-time police resource officer. Student enrolment is projected to drop to 1,763 for September 1995. Ten teachers and six support staff will be declared surplus to the school's needs for 1995-96. The projected budget which has been allocated to the school for 1995-96 is $6,385,938.

Shirley talked about the uniqueness of Jasper Place:

> Most of the students who come to Jasper Place live in the west end. We are not a magnet school; we are a neighborhood school. We plan to educate the kids in the neighborhood, and most of them are within easy travelling distance.

The school serves students from a wide range of socio-economic backgrounds, from those who are poor to those who are very well-to-do. About 45 languages are spoken at the school, and it is a district site for both English as a second language and learning disabilities programs.

Reputation of the School Before 1990

Before September 1990, Jasper Place High School's reputation was somewhat mixed; for many people it was very negative. One of the department heads recalled that "it was never a bad school; sometimes the reputation we had wasn't warranted." One of the current Jasper Place parents told this story:

> We've been in Edmonton for four years now, and when we moved here, first of all, we were told, "Go to any high school, but not J. P., because J. P. is the bottom of the barrel. And you don't want your kid to go there. There's too much violence, a lack of leadership, and so on."

Students, too, knew of the poor reputation of the school. Greg, now in Grade 12, told about his sister going to Jasper Place in 1986 and staying for one year.

> She was here for Grade Ten, and needless to say, it was a really different school. I think that was when they were going through a bit of a change. They were having some problems with the different social groups in the school, collisions, and things like that.

Shirley Stiles' Arrival

The administration at the school had changed frequently until September 1990, when Shirley was appointed principal. In fact, she was the sixth principal in eight years. Her arrival was also preceded by a fire in the spring of 1990 which completely destroyed the office area. Repairs and renovations were underway but not complete for the start of her first year. In addition, Shirley discovered a budget deficit of $750,000 when she arrived.

The head secretary recalled Shirley's arrival:

> When Shirley first came to the school, we had gone through five principals, and I don't think that she was greeted with that much warmth. Not that I had anything against her, because I did not know her as an individual. But we were just tired of the changes. At least I was, to be specific. It was just a joke that I didn't need another job, I just had to come to work here every year because I had a new boss.
>
> Something else that greeted her when she arrived here was the fact that we had the fire, so she had no office to work in. So here she was, in this little office, with all these other people,

> trying to make decisions, trying to interview people, trying to get things going. And she had no place to work from. I think that was very, very difficult initially.

One of the teachers added to the picture: "I was here when this whole thing came down, when it was announced we were losing *another* principal, and someone else was coming in. I hadn't heard anything about Shirley before that." The staff reacted negatively to the change and were not initially receptive to Shirley as another in the chain of principals.

Several staff members commented not only about the greeting that Shirley received on her arrival, but also on the state of the school: "When Shirley came in here, her first year, I really honestly believe she could not believe some of the things that went on in this school. There were always kids in the hall." The reputation of Jasper Place was not ideal.

Shirley's recollection was similar:

> It was quite a difficult entry into the school. The principal I was replacing had only been here for two years and had made some dramatic changes, and the staff felt very uncomfortable about yet another change. I don't believe it was anything personal, but it was very uncomfortable. They were very upset about the fact that they felt that Jasper Place was being dumped on. Not me dumped on them, but the fact that there had been all these changes.
>
> I came into a school that had a very divided staff. It was divided into three groups, the "haves," the "neutrals," and the "have nots." The "haves" were the phys ed department. They had been given everything they had asked for—renovations, incredible monies, tremendous recognition. They virtually ran the school. The "neutrals" were the academic departments who didn't quite feel that they were being recognized as they should be and they were sometimes the victims. And the "have nots" were the vocational area. There was a perception that vocational courses had no value. The painting of the school stopped right at the beginning of the Careers and Technology (CTS) wing. These areas had been converted without the staff's involvement, and there was a definite feeling of discomfort. These courses were not recognized as being worthy courses. There was a very large group of teachers who were feeling very, very uncomfortable. And that's what I walked into.

> Combined with the fact that the general office had burned down, we had to open the school for the next year out of a little room. As well, I discovered that there was a three-quarters-of-a-million-dollar deficit. It was what I would call a very traumatic entrance.

Reputation of the School in 1995

Over the past five years things have changed at Jasper Place. The school's reputation has become more positive. The assistant superintendent of planning for the district recalled that parents who would not have considered Jasper Place for their son or daughter five years ago are now coming to the school and feeling positive about the school's reputation. The school's population climbed to over 2,000 students in 1992-93 and 1993-94. Although numbers will be down slightly in 1995-96, this is a demographic trend in the district itself.

As I arrived for my first visit to Jasper Place, I was impressed that there were six visitor parking spaces and that they were close to the school entrance. More importantly, there was an empty spot for me. On my walk to the office, students smiled and said "Hi!" Already I felt welcome.

The main office is a massive room, long and narrow. All the support-staff stations are out in the open, and the head secretary sits near the door at the south end of the office.

What a treat to go into an office that looked friendly! There were no benches on which to sit, but against the long wall was an arrangement of comfortable chairs and small tables. Students and parents could wait in comfort. Framed art decorated the walls, and I could see the names of the student artists attached to each work. Those displays changed every two weeks throughout my stay.

Although it was before 8:00 in the morning, a few parents were in the office as well as an assortment of students. Shirley was "cruising the line," making sure that everyone had been dealt with. She knew the students, two by name, and asked one of the parents about last evening's basketball game and how his son felt about the score. I felt welcomed and was eager to learn.

Everyone we met, Shirley introduced. By the time we had walked in the halls for 20 minutes and dropped by some classrooms, I could count 25 people whom I now knew. Dozens of students also greeted us as we walked. I could sense that people liked being at Jasper Place and liked Shirley. The school did not seem negative in any way.

The staff shared with me that they noticed the difference from earlier years with comments such as, "The reputation because of her leadership has improved dramatically, and the community has been very supportive of her"; "We have a much better reputation in the community"; "I think the image of the school has grown in a positive way since the time Shirley has been here"; "I would say Jasper Place is one of the best in the system. I don't think parents quite believe that yet, parents outside of Jasper Place, because of Jasper Place's reputation over the years, but I think that's slowly changing."

One of the students echoed the staff: "I think Mrs. Stiles has done a good job at J. P. J. P. has really, really improved since she's been here. And I think we, the students and the teachers, owe her a lot."

The parent who talked about the negative views of Jasper Place when the family arrived in Edmonton continued the story:

> The principal of the junior high feeder school our second son attended encouraged us to watch what was happening at Jasper Place with the new principal, while our son was in junior high. Well, we watched and we were very impressed with what we saw at J. P. Our second son has attended Jasper Place.

It sounded easy, but Shirley knew how difficult it was to change the school's reputation. She told of going to Smitty's for breakfast this spring and the waitress saying: "Where do you work again?" and when Shirley replied, "Jasper Place," the waitress continued, "Oh, that's a terribly tough school. I went there twenty-seven years ago, and there were gang fights and everything." It's difficult to convince all people that the school has changed.

What Changed?

With 2,000 individuals in the school each day, Jasper Place has the size and complexity of a small town. Add in the community involved at the school, and the population increases dramatically.

Asked to identify changes that have made the school a different place from what it was before Shirley Stiles, it would be easy to respond that one person on her own has made the difference. However, with the complexities of size and with the range of programs and activities in a large urban high school, most people in the school focus, not so much on Shirley, but on differences that they as individuals have noticed which have changed the nature of their roles, their attitudes toward the school, or the nature of the leadership within the school. When people described how it was compared to how it is, they tended to bring the changes to life through personal experiences.

The word *team* is one that has been commonly used at Jasper Place. The staff saw Shirley as a team player, and decisions were seen to be made as a group rather than by the principal on her own. The staff believed that new staff members have been selected on the basis of their ability to be team players. The notion of team existed throughout the school. The custodian saw himself as a team builder too. He commented:

> I've developed a fairly good team; we really get along well together, and I've done some different things to try to stimulate that. We have a coffee fund where nobody pays for coffee, and everyone picks up pop cans. We pool the pop cans together and we buy our coffee out of that so staff can get supplies for themselves. At Christmas time we each get a ham, and we usually go out during Spring Break for a meal together.

The focus on the team has enhanced the atmosphere or tone of the building for some staff:

> I think that when she became principal of the school, her first task was to change the atmosphere and the trust of the teachers and the cooperation between the different groups of people in the school. Her first task was to make sure that everybody felt comfortable and that we had a more positive tone in the school.

Others described the camaraderie of staff, the consensus building that has occurred, the cooperation and the trust. One staff member saw a relationship between students, administrators, and teachers that he had not seen in other high schools where he had taught.

But changes in the environment in terms of safety have also been of note. "I think Jasper Place is a very safe environment, safe for learning, and safe physically for the students. My perception of Jasper Place before I was hired did not really reflect that at all." Cleanliness has also improved. The custodian who arrived in the spring of 1990 said: "When I started here it was actually a real mess."

Changes in the learning environment have also occurred over the past five years. The staff commented on the fewer number of students in the hallways during class time and the improved learning conditions. One department head commented on the past malaise of students who did not care about their school, but now,

> when I walk down the hallway, I see very few kids during the school time in the hallways. I see hallways that are clean, I see kids who talk to each other with some kind of respect, I see kids who talk about being safe in the school, feeling safe, not being intimidated. I see a lot of changes here from four years ago.

The focus has now been on success and students being ready for success. Those who have done their best have been honored. A science teacher commented:

> When I first came here, gentleman's marks were acceptable. If you got a 60%, or if you passed a course, that was good enough. And if you did too well you might not be accepted by your peers. Now, that no longer is the tone, I feel. Excellence is very much accepted, and it is no longer unacceptable to do well. We all do our individual best.

Teachers have also noticed changes in their own behavior. One teacher has seen some change in many staff:

> I would say not the whole staff, but a good majority of the staff really take it upon themselves to literally do as outlined in our student handbook and our principal's message, "Let's get students in the classrooms to learn and to make it a safe environment." It just makes it a good place to learn.

The relationships that have existed between administrators and staff have been consistent, fair, and grounded in a strong sense of integrity. The staff have seen the principal's and the assistant principals' conduct as above reproach. "I have been at other schools where cliques develop, and you can perceive that certain administrators side with certain groups of people. That's never been the case here," was a common message.

Shirley's approach has been direct. One of the assistant principals indicated that "I am sure that there wouldn't be one person in this school who would not know that if she had a problem with me, she'd let me know." Another commented:

> Sometimes people don't like what Shirley has to say to them, but they would never say to you that they don't know how things are happening or what Shirley feels about the things that they've done. So if she has a problem with something that has happened, she'll call you in and talk about it. If something wonderful happens, she'll call you in and talk about it. As a matter of fact, twice a year, whether we need to or not, she calls everybody in and talks.

An openness has been created at Jasper Place High School. The staff and students have seen the principal as accessible and open to them. One of the teachers described her as being "one of the more open-minded with regards to the open-door policy. I sometimes wish that it wasn't so, for her own sake." This openness has not been just to staff and students. Student teachers who have arrived at Jasper Place have had a lunch meeting with Shirley and the assistant principal responsible for their program, to ensure that they are comfortable in the school. Parents noted her openness as refreshing:

> So often principals tend to say, "Look, our policies are right here; it's your child who is the problem." Shirley doesn't have that approach. She's very open. If there's a problem, she's not defensive. She says, "Let's talk about it."

Another comment that frequently arose was how supportive the administration has been of all programs that assist students to be successful. The football coach acknowledged Shirley's belief in what sports do for student learning and told a delightful story of how Shirley has demonstrated her support:

> When she first came here, that's when I took over the football program coaching the Rebels. And by the way, it was a disaster. An honor student, to a football player on that team, was somebody he didn't even know.
>
> During that year, we didn't win a game and I was always having to tell kids to take their shoes off as they came into the school. I was hammering on kids every day that first season: "Get your shoes off!"
>
> Shirley attended every game.
>
> The second year we won a couple of games, and then we came up against Harry Ainlay. I thought we could beat them.

> The half-time score was 27-0 for Ainlay. Well, the final score was 41-27 for us.
>
> Shirley had got back to school before we did. We walked in the door, and Shirley was out there congratulating the kids as they returned. She came up to me afterward, and she said, "You know what I find most important?"
>
> I said, "The smiles on their faces?"
>
> "No, you didn't have to tell anybody to take their shoes off!"
>
> Now basically what we're talking about is empowerment of students, empowerment of people to take responsibility for their own actions. She empowers the teachers to get the students to empower themselves. Once you've got that, you don't have a problem.

The empowerment of which the football coach spoke is similar to what some other staff have seen; however, many have had other experiences in high schools that were not as empowering:

> Unlike here, I've had the other experience where the principal felt very uncomfortable with giving the authority and the freedom to anybody else. And as a result, everybody ran around kowtowing to the needs of the principal, without understanding what the issues were because we were not given the honor of thinking for ourselves.

As well, countless staff, students, and parents spoke of the visibility of the administration. A parent commented:

> Well, whenever I'm here, she's always directly with the kids. If I come in at noon hour, she's always in the hallways with them. I think she's very reachable. When I was in high school, I can remember the principal on a pedestal, someone you had to really respect. And you feared. I think Shirley is more with the kids and the communication lines are more open.

This visibility has allowed Shirley to lead by example. The staff have seen this as a real motivator. The custodian too recognized her modelling: "When she walks down the hallway, if she sees paper, she picks it up. And she rubs the black marks off stuff. I've never seen another principal that would do that." On our daily tours I found myself following her example and picking things up, too.

Are these the things that have made the difference over the past five years? Do the anecdotes illustrate a new philosophy of education at Jasper

Place? Are these just isolated examples expressed by individuals, or do they illustrate a vision, a plan in the mind of the principal, a plan which has moved Jasper Place along the road to better performance?

Philosophy and Beliefs

Shirley Stiles, the high school administrator, is a multi-faceted individual. Seeing her in Jasper Place High School over an extended period of time, I was struck by how effortless her administration appeared. Soon I became aware that the simplicity was not a result of having only a few issues to deal with but rather the result of a complex interplay of her many skills and understandings. Her experience in high school administration has enabled her to be unconsciously skilled. To others it looks easy. The interrelationships between her philosophy and her orientation to people are reflected in the practices at the school and the programs that she has put into place at Jasper Place which have led to the success of the school.

The philosophy and beliefs which Shirley holds have several components. She has strong views about the value of learning and schooling; she has high standards and expectations, and has required each individual to set goals for each year. Her beliefs about leadership are clear, and her concern for safety and wellness are central to her philosophy. She has an optimistic, positive approach to life and is strongly committed to being visible and accessible. Her vision for Jasper Place High School, clear in its premises and yet complex in its demands, has been understood by staff, students, and parents.

Beliefs about Learning and Schooling

Two of the major factors that have had an impact on the atmosphere and tone of Jasper Place are Shirley's beliefs and philosophy about students, learning, and schooling. Everyone she has met in the context of Jasper Place has soon heard about what the school represents. She has attended meetings at all the feeder junior high schools:

> I'm used to going out to parents' meetings. I go out and talk about what we believe in at Jasper Place and talk about expectations, discipline, safety in the school, options. I go to as many of those as I can. In fact, I go to *all* of them.

At J.P.'s Open House she has shared her beliefs with parents, students, and the community. Visitors from within the district, from other cities, provinces, and countries have heard about Shirley and Jasper Place, and each week mail and phone calls have arrived requesting that Shirley share her understandings or her beliefs in another setting or host a group at Jasper Place. The school has often been filled with adults enjoying her attention. One of the students, in describing how often he saw Shirley, recounted:

> She's everywhere; you wonder where she gets time to come to her office. I always see her walking around with other people and showing the school. I've seen some people from Africa, exchange people, and she's toured them around the school. It's really good meeting all these new people. And she introduces us, too. Really interesting!

Her beliefs and philosophy are public, and all the staff know what Shirley represents and what she will support. Hence, no one has been discouraged from trying something, because they know in advance what fits the J.P. philosophy. Shirley has supported them because she knows that "by the time they come to me to ask for support, because they know the way we operate in this school, the ideas are superb." One of the teachers saw the support in this way:

> I feel that for the good of the students if I had a new idea that I wanted to try, I might mention it as a courtesy to my department head or to the administration, just to make sure they understood. They should know what I'm doing. Now after that, I'm one hundred percent sure I will be fully supported by the administration and my department head, and everybody in the school. Now we're in a position where we can take risks.

All staff have been clear about the beliefs that are held. The police resource officer explained:

> Mrs. Stiles spends a lot of time informing the staff, making us aware of what's happening, through surveys, through meetings. Everybody is informed of the framework that we're working in, and has knowledge of that. It seems like that because of the information sharing at all levels. We're all working towards that same goal, and we're all aware of what we're doing.

What does she believe? Students come first. Any decision that is made at Jasper Place must pass the test that it is in the best interest of students. In the Staff Handbook the school's philosophy is displayed:

> The philosophy of a school grows from the recognition that a school exists for students. In light of this, the Administrators and Staff of J.P. believe that our primary purpose is the ongoing development of each student, both as an individual and as a member of a democratic society.
>
> This philosophy implies a progressive development for each student, not only in the mastering of knowledge and special skills for each discipline, but in the preparation for a lifetime of learning. It also implies an appreciation of our moral and ethical values, our cultural heritage and our changing social environment.
>
> The development of this philosophy is the shared responsibility of the school, the home and the student. The school works toward the development of challenging learning experiences, while the home is encouraged to participate in this process whenever possible. The student is expected to respond in a positive manner to the learning experiences provided, while maintaining a high level of commitment to participate in the daily school routine. This will be accomplished in a school facility conveniently arranged and aesthetically pleasing for those who participate in our school life.

The staff, in describing Shirley's beliefs, used statements such as "She ultimately has the interests of everybody in the place at hand, kids, or kids and staff"; "She's a kids' person"; "The kids are first and foremost"; "She never loses sight of the fact that the reason she's here is because the kids are"; "She goes to bat for the students 100% of the time"; and "The bottom line is always kids." Each student who approached her during my visits was greeted warmly and welcomed by Shirley whether it was in the hallway, in the general office, at a game, or outside the building.

Activities that used to be teacher driven are now led by students. The Awards Night has had a student master of ceremonies, the Rebel Basketball Tournament (REB) Breakfast has been hosted by students, and students have sat on all the school committees. The staff acknowledged that Shirley has fostered the view that they are here for students and that students should be part of all the processes.

Each month students have been surveyed on a matter of interest to the principal, and many changes have occurred because of student input. Recently, the clocks that never worked were replaced, and vending machines were installed, both as a result of student input. The students have also requested plug-ins for the half of the parking lot that was without them. At the assemblies Shirley acknowledged their request but indicated that the school could not afford to provide them in the current budget.

Shirley spoke with pride of the students' suggestion to alleviate the problem of smoking at the front of the school:

> Kids have the best ideas. We have been having trouble with students smoking at the front of the school for one hundred and ten years. It doesn't look great, and you don't want them there. People drive by and phone you and say, "What's the matter with you, don't you know smoking is bad? Why do you have kids smoking at the front of the school?" So we would try to move them. We'd put up maps and put big X's at the front of the school, but it didn't make any difference. You move; they move back.
>
> So last year these Grade Twelve boys came to me and said, "We're leaving, but we have a solution for smoking at the front of the school. You need to find two places for us to smoke where we can smoke with some dignity." They had found two places that were hidden from the front, and they said that if I put a cement pad down, students could get outside from the main

> corridor, be out of view, and won't even track mud in. We figured it would cost $20,000 to do it. But we did it. We haven't had one smoker at the front. Why didn't I ask them before?

One student's comment was overheard by a staff member when Shirley had been at the school for a year: "I'm going to see Mrs. Stiles. She'll know the answer to that." The staff member reflected about how many high school students would even consider going to the principal to obtain the answer to a question. Students know that she will talk with them and that they matter at Jasper Place.

She demonstrated that belief when she arrived at Jasper Place almost five years ago. She decided to have regular assemblies, one with each grade level, a practice she has continued. When the three assemblies were over, she said that she had seen everyone in the school. The staff replied that she had not seen the "K kids," a group of students of high school age who had not completed the junior high curriculum and were in a segregated program. When she asked why they had not been at the Grade 10 assembly, she was told that they were not Grade 10s. She had an assembly with them and remembered the experience with sadness:

> They wouldn't look at me; they were badly behaved. Finally, I stopped what I was trying to say and said, "What's the problem?" They said, "We hate this place; we can't earn credits; everybody hates us."
>
> So we decided, at that point, that it had to change. What we decided was that in actual fact they were Grade Tens. They were going to take a little longer than most kids, for a variety or reasons, and we would let them earn credits.

The K program became the Pilot program, and the only teachers who taught the Pilot students were those who volunteered. The program became a privilege rather than a punishment for staff and students. Shirley said that it has been wonderful to watch the successes that have come for these students. She has chosen in her teaching assignment to teach Math 14 and Personal Living Skills 10 to this group over the past few years.

Shirley has seen that one of the things that is critical for the Pilot students is to learn to become independent. Students have a great deal of support in their first year and in the second year will receive support from the learning-assistance teacher for part of the day, as well as from the counsellors. Students usually are given one teacher who taught them the previous year, and they are monitored quite closely.

Shirley and the staff at Jasper Place believe that learning is important for all students. Grade 10 and 11 students must register in a full program and have not been allowed to have spare periods. Grade 12 students may have spares, but these have been discouraged if students have been able to complete their programs by taking a full course load.

To emphasize the focus on learning, the first objective in Jasper Place's 1995-96 budget is that "one hundred per cent of our students will be given instructions and written materials about how to learn." Included within the plan to achieve this objective are materials to be used in the Student Advisor program, communication of "Learn to Learn" expectations, and immediate parent contact if students do not meet expectations.

This learning focus is not new. In the second semester last year, the emphasis was on being ready to learn. Shirley reinforced this each time she spoke to groups of students, reminding them that "everything in this school points to the fact that we are anxious for you to learn, and everything we do will support that." This included closing the cafeteria during class time and opening a study hall. The cafeteria, she pointed out to the students, was closed not because "we don't like you, but because it is not assisting you.

It is not a place to go and learn." The students accepted the change with some disappointment but little anger.

Her approach to students at each assembly varied by grade level. She was teaching the Grade 10 students, reinforcing her beliefs with the Grade 11s, and thanking the Grade 12s for their cooperation.

Believing that learning is important also has meant that each course a student takes is considered important. To give all courses the same status, students have been able to attain honors standing and be acknowledged at honors lunches for whatever courses they take. Automotives has had the same status as calculus. This has meant that courses have become more focused on learning as well. The department head for physical education has developed a final examination in physical education to "bring the academic point of view to our area and also to tell the kids we have expectations that go beyond just playing around and having fun."

Athletes who play on school teams have had high academic standing. One of the football players said that "Mrs. Stiles is a big influence on that. Some of her requirements are that you have good marks, and that's actually helping people to achieve marks. That's what she expects of us, too."

Another spinoff from this focus on learning has been Shirley's rejection of the Integrated Occupations Program (IOP). This program has offered courses at the 16, 26, and 36 levels for students who have not experienced success in school. Shirley believes that the IOP Program is a dead end for students, with no transferability to courses that would give a student a chance to achieve a high school diploma. Although students who have simply not been able to achieve credits at the 14 level have been granted credits at the 16 level, no courses have been offered. The 14-level courses have been stretched to meet the needs of all the students in the class.

Students who would have been registered in IOP in other schools have been included within the Pilot program, involved in work experience, and aimed toward further schooling at Alberta Vocational Centre. Most of the parents, once they have met with the principal, have realized this is best for their student and have welcomed Shirley's honesty.

Shirley spoke with passion about the Pilot students:

> We've had some of our kids who've come through the Pilot program, two in particular, who are now going to go to university, and if we had labelled them IOP, they would never have got there. I only need one of those in a lifetime to tell me that we better be looking at how we shunt kids or close the door.

The Mission Statement, developed in Shirley's time at J.P., has added another dimension—success. It states:

> **Jasper Place School is SERIOUS ABOUT SUCCESS for each individual student.** The purpose of the school is to provide opportunities for each student to grow in a positive environment which fosters good **results** (according to their abilities), **responsibility** (exemplary citizenship) and **recognition** of good performance.

Balanced with the notion of success is the expectation that all students who attend Jasper Place are challenged to attain the highest level of achievement possible.

Jasper Place High School has existed so that students will have the opportunity to stay in school and successfully complete their program. One parent stated the issue clearly: "Do you want a kid to stay in school? Then put in place the structures that help that student to be successful."

One strategy that was tried this year was particularly successful in reinforcing the importance of doing school work to lead to success. These were the Extended Learning Opportunities (ELOs). Simply, ELOs are detentions for work that has not been completed. Two of the assistant principals agreed to supervise a classroom each day to allow students the opportunity to serve their ELOs and complete their work. The importance of these ELOs was constantly reinforced throughout the first semester. There were in excess of 200 students who had not served their ELOs as the Christmas break approached. Students were then given the opportunity to complete a work package over the break, in place of the ELO. Many of the students complied. Letters were sent to the parents of students who had not served the ELO or completed the work package, indicating that the student's registration for the second semester would be withdrawn if these ELOs were not cleared up. Additional work packages were available for those who had lost the earlier one.

There were still about 30 students who had not finished the work. During advisor class, just prior to the start of second semester, timetables were distributed. When the students who had not complied did not receive a timetable, it became clear that the school was serious. By the second day of the second semester, all students were finished their work packages, and all timetables were set. Some of those students had timetables that were not perfect, but they had chosen not to do the work required to receive their original schedule and were forced to take spaces in classes which were available.

Acceptance of the process by parents was total. One father came in and said: "This is the best thing you've ever done. I can't believe you were that patient." He said that he had told his son that he would have been fired from his business at step two. The process was seen to be fair and in the best interest of the students and their potential success.

Many support systems including teachers, counsellors, and teacher aides have also been there to assist. Shirley believes that everyone needs a support system. "You don't need to be labelled to get help" is practiced at Jasper Place.

When one of the department heads was asked what is different since Shirley came to Jasper Place, she responded: "I think that a wide range of students have a larger chance of being more successful than when I first started here. I think it's a more effective school for kids. For all kids."

Jasper Place's 1995-96 Registration Guide prepared for Grade 9 students to help them make decisions says: "The school philosophy is founded on the belief that if students are given the right kinds of academic and extra-curricular opportunities in a safe, secure and learning environment, they will strive for excellence and experience success." Student needs have been considered during the registration process. Shirley has made it clear that there are advantages of a big school, but other high schools also provide other things such as International Baccalaureate that J.P. does not.

Shirley has ensured that a wide range of courses is available at Jasper Place to meet the needs of the students. Students have been placed in courses where they can experience both challenge and success.

She has embraced Career and Technology Studies (CTS) and envisions Jasper Place as a CTS showcase for the district. She wants all courses to be seen as important. "The country needs a range of people with a range of expertise, but we have to make people feel it's okay to be a welder or a hairdresser or to work in the service industries."

Advanced Placement has been offered at Jasper Place to challenge the more able students. Shirley is knowledgeable about the AP courses, and although the examinations have been available for those students to challenge, it is the opportunity to stretch academically that Shirley values.

However, she has also sensed when to limit programs. She indicated that people believe that because the Pilot program is so successful, it should be expanded. She does not want it any bigger; she believes it is currently the right proportion for the school. The availability of teacher aides to support the program has been critical, and the cost of additional aides would be prohibitive.

A comprehensive support system has existed in the school of which Shirley reminds everyone regularly. The classroom teacher, other support teachers, department heads, counsellors, administrators, the police resource officer, support staff, and custodians have all seen their role as helping students to be successful. She told of one student who was expelled from Jasper Place who would not have been had she gone for support from one of the staff rather than going for the weapon and attacking someone. She felt that the school had failed the student.

As well, Jasper Place has been dedicated to programming appropriately for the wide range of groups in the school, whether it has been those with special needs, those from particular cultures, or those with infants or young children, whom Shirley affectionately called "teen moms." Shirley has constantly monitored whether the support is there and whether adjustments need to be made. When a social worker from the Native community arrived at the school, he was welcomed, encouraged to be visible and involved in the school, and offered open access to the school.

The focus on the student has been reflected in the expectations for the teachers. As well as teachers having to volunteer for the Pilot program and the Advanced Placement courses, Shirley has required that at least two teachers teach each course. For example, Physics 30 has always been presented by more than one teacher. Almost all of the option areas, as well, have had a choice of teacher for students. It has also been a requirement that teachers teach both academic and nonacademic courses in their subject area and at different grade levels. Although this sounds simple, this is not common practice in high schools and was achieved only after three years of encouragement and moving teachers in that direction. One of the teachers in an option area indicated that he really wished he had the entire program, but he has remained a strong supporter of Shirley in spite of the fact that someone else shared "his" program.

When asked how she felt that this change is working, Shirley maintained that it has been excellent for professional development, for collegiality, and for consistency, as well as being fairer to students. The schedule which has been set by one of the assistant principals reflects this philosophy.

One of the assistant principals explained the school's philosophy this way:

> If you don't happen to believe that little Johnny, whose IQ is 96, is every bit as important as the good guy who wins everything and gets 98% in every diploma exam; if you don't believe that his education is every bit as important as the honors student, then you would have trouble here, because you would believe that you would move from teaching Math 10 to Math 20, and finally you get 30, and you just stay there forever until the world collapses around you and you retire. We don't believe that way at all.
>
> Our 30 level teachers teach 24s, they teach 14s and they enjoy it. The first time through they're scared. We have a teacher with us who has been here for twenty-seven years and has taught the 30s and 31s. This year we said, "It's time for you to try some of the others. We'd like you at all levels." We gave him a 24 and he sort of "sucked it up" because the comfort level and the trust had been built, and teachers always want to help Shirley. Well, he enjoys it; he loves it! He goes out now and finds all of his 24s, and he's pulled them through. If they hadn't finished and passed when the semester ended, he followed them through and grabbed them again this semester, and said, "You've only got a unit done; come on, get this finished. I want you to finish." He's a different person. So next year when we ask him again, there will be no question. We could have left him with the 30s and 31s but in my mind we helped him.

Shirley also sees herself as a learner. When I asked if she could see herself getting better at doing things and finding solutions, she responded:

> What you do is, you learn from your mistakes. You don't learn from the things that went well; you learn from the things that have a slight hiccup in them. Then I think you realize how to do it better the next time.
>
> I think it's critical that people keep notes. For example, if you've been through a process of downsizing, or getting rid of the cafeteria, or going through an expulsion, or working with a difficult parent, just jot down the notes and then look back when you've cooled down a bit. You can say, "Okay, obviously what I did wrong was there," or "I could've done better at this point." But you definitely get better with practice. And I think you start to recognize what could happen earlier. That's just experience in a school.

Shirley writes her notes in the early morning hours, when she first arrives at school. Some of the notes she files by topic but her calendar is filled with comments as well. Shirley's daily calendar is done on the computer, either by the head secretary or by Shirley. The assistant principals can view the calendar but not modify it. But her "real" calendar is in a binder on the corner of her desk. In this binder she outlines her activities and responsibilities for the week. As she receives information that must be addressed, either related to the school or district requirements, she categorizes the task. If she is able to delegate it, she does, and notes who is now responsible. If it is a task for her, she decides if it is urgent or if it can wait. The tasks are distributed on her calendar and spread throughout the week. One of the most interesting features of Shirley's schedule is that, if she finishes the tasks for Monday, she does not begin Tuesday's tasks. When I asked for the reason for this, she said, "I've learned that the day has to end and if I've completed my day's schedule I can leave satisfied." Everyone learns at Jasper Place.

Standards, Expectations, and Goals

Standards have been high at Jasper Place. Everyone in the building has set goals for the year. Shirley has three goals, and she indicated:

> I share them with the staff at the staff meeting at the beginning of the year. Mine are public; everyone needs to know what they are. I tell them the indicators, and I review them. I think that you can't talk the talk and not walk the walk. It's very important for me to do that and to be held accountable.

She has had the three assistant principals set goals for themselves and review them with her. She believes that each person should always have something that is achievable, but each person should have some goals which require growth. If an assistant principal were to select goals which would not be challenging, Shirley would suggest another goal which would be. This would be done only after she had seen their choices. She is confident that her current team knows her style and knows the expectations that she has. One assistant principal commented: "Having those goals and coming up with ways of measuring how successful you are and how far along the way you are can cause real change."

These goals have been reviewed twice a year, and a written performance appraisal has been provided to each assistant principal annually. Assistant principals have used a similar process with department heads, department heads with teachers, and teachers, in advisor periods, with students. The students have set goals for their first semester in the advisor program. These goals have been reviewed at the start of the second semester to determine how well they have been achieved, and new goals for the second semester have been set. These mid-year reviews have happened because Shirley believes that a year is too long a period without feedback.

As well, Shirley has scheduled two one-to-ones with every member of the staff each year to discuss their goals, even though she does not evaluate their performance. Her monitoring has provided each person with a time to share with her. She has learned an incredible amount during these sessions. Moreover, she remembers what people say and in daily conversations is able to chat about their goals. People have also been encouraged to share other things in their one-on-ones relating to themselves or to the school. Her conversations with staff as she walked about the school varied from, "How is your planning for the graduation night coming?" to "What was your time in the marathon on Saturday?" to "Did you arrange for a new nanny for the kids?" to "Can Mike [Shirley's husband] call you to get some printing done?" It seemed that she had an amazing knowledge of each person. Her daily conversations were varied with each one.

Not only will Shirley discuss goals with staff, but she also often asks students about their goals. This has become a topic of conversation with parents as well. Parents need to know their children set goals for themselves, is Shirley's belief. Parents, although not directly involved in the goals set by their son or daughter, have expressed support for the process. One mother indicated: "The kids need to realize the importance of setting goals, and that's part of the success for the whole school. She ensures that there's proper instruction from counselling on setting goals, and in the advisor and CALM class."

For those students who have difficulty setting goals or meeting expectations, the administrators have had contracts. Shirley explained:

> For young people who have difficulty either in attending, being on time, or handing in their assignments, we've pulled them in and said, "We're going to help you. We believe that it would be best if you worked under this kind of contract which gives you much tighter requirements." The contract stipulates that failure to comply may result in losing classes or dismissal from the school.

Not only have students been requested to go on a contract, but several have also actually come to the office asking to be given a contract. Shirley told of a young man who wanted to be on a contract in the second semester. She refused, saying that he had done well on a contract for two semesters but that it was time to "learn to fly." He went away to try for a month and discovered he could do it on his own.

Other students automatically put on a contract are those who have been on probation. The probation officer has an office in the school and there has been a supportive relationship between the rehabilitation system and the school. An assistant principal told the story of the probation officer getting an office:

> One little decision in response to a person coming in from a probation office and saying, "Gee, it would be nice if I didn't have to come here so often, if I had a room." And, here it is. Now all of a sudden we have our probation officer meeting our kids here. You may think it's no big deal, but now our kids have no reason to be away, because it's the only time they can see their probation officer. No reason to miss seeing a probation officer because he's right here in the school. And it's easy. It's all based on the philosophy, "Let's do the best we can for our kids." We didn't bring him here because we have horrible kids or because we needed him to help us or anything like that. It just goes back to that belief that it's good for kids.

Students on probation have stayed at Jasper Place under the conditions of the contract. Shirley felt that most of the time contracts have worked to the benefit of the student and the school, but if the contract has not worked, students may be removed from class or from the school. The school is becoming firmer about students meeting expectations.

Behavior expectations have been clear at Jasper Place. The Code of Conduct is stated positively:

1. I am respectful.
2. I am responsible.
3. I am safe.
4. I am prepared.

> 5. We are here to learn; therefore, I will do nothing to keep the teacher from teaching, and anyone, myself included, from learning.
> 6. I will cooperate with all school people.
> 7. I will respect myself, others, and the environment.
> 8. By acting in this way, I am capable, connecting, and contributing.

When the committee established to develop the monthly advisor packages met to discuss the March 1995 materials, one of the teachers suggested that in the packages it be made clear that this code was a code for everyone in the school, not just the students. This was done when the packages were prepared and discussed at the staff meeting. Shirley commended the teacher at the committee meeting and thanked him publicly for his good idea at the staff meeting. She reinforced the importance of the code and commented how positive it was that so many copies were on display in classrooms. She said afterwards that her comment was designed to encourage a few remaining teachers to post the code.

The establishment of a Study Hall in the library, where all students are expected to be if they are not in a class, was carried out last year. This was done to ensure that standards for student achievement and for student behavior would be met. Shirley explained:

> We assigned the teachers to Study Hall so that there was someone there whose assignment was to check you in if you came, perhaps offer you some help if you needed it. Then we could say to students, "You may not be in the hallways; there is only one place in the building you can be."
>
> What happened was that we went from kids in the hallways to zero. And some kids have really used it; they find it a quiet place to be. What I've said to parents is, "We have a place where we will supervise student learning in this building all day. If Grade Twelves have a spare, they can choose to be out of the building. But if they are in the building, that's where they will be." And it's worked like a charm.

Attendance standards have been in place as well. Shirley believes that over the years educators have encouraged students to take their time and not be serious about attendance. She explained:

> And now we have to undo it, and it doesn't happen overnight. My biggest concern is attendance because it's the kids who don't attend who get into trouble; it's the kids who don't attend who don't complete their courses; and it's the kids who don't attend who come from families without support. I think that's why we've decided to tighten up on some of the requirements, because if you get an atmosphere where you don't attend, or it doesn't matter if you do, you are affecting the learning of those who want to learn.

Shirley has set standards not only with respect to performance and behavior, but also with respect to service. The standard for dealing with issues and responding to calls has been within 24 hours. Mail has been dealt with on a daily basis, and if any issues cannot be resolved, they have at least been acknowledged within a day. "It's amazing how the little things can be sorted out before they bubble up," she said.

All issues within the school have been handled immediately. Shirley has decided that the best way to deal with people and errors is to handle things right away; everyone now expects this to be the standard. The head secretary said that it helps in that "you don't lose any sleep over things, if you address them right away." This timeliness has aided in the solution as well. Shirley has met with the individual involved and has provided support to ensure that the problem has been resolved. The person knows that the next time there is a potential problem, her support can be accessed before the problem erupts.

One of the assistant principals acknowledged that "she has a tough role, because there are some tough decisions that have to be made, but she makes them, and she does it in a timely fashion."

Many of the issues she has drawn to the attention of staff might be ignored by other administrators. One of the teachers, Shirley had been informed, had been at a party on the weekend and was overheard commenting negatively about the J. P. students. This had been the second time that Shirley had heard this about this particular individual. Shirley called him in and asked him about it. She began by asking him if he were happy at Jasper Place. When he responded that he was, she confronted him with his comments. Whether he would comment in a public setting again was unpredictable, but the staff member certainly knew how Shirley felt.

In another situation, an exchange teacher had gone to the ATA about an issue at the school, without speaking to anyone at the school. Again Shirley called the staff member in to discuss the issue and to express her disappointment. Although Shirley does not avoid these situations, she has found them among the toughest things she has to do.

Other information has also been shared with staff immediately. One of the department heads commented that "because so much information flows so quickly when she knows it, there's a feeling that we're all in the same boat together." Timeliness builds trust, in Shirley's view.

Teachers have also been expected to respond to all calls within 24 hours. However, if a teacher has been unable to respond, the call has been forwarded to one of the four administrators, who have responded for the teacher. There has been a genuine understanding that sometimes teachers have commitments which interfere with their meeting the standard, and the leadership team has willingly pitched in.

Shirley's high standards are well known. One staff member said that this is great: "We enjoy working with her, and I think, by now, people are comfortable working with her, because we know what she stands for, what she wants, and what's acceptable and what's not acceptable." Another commented that a few people have said that she demands too much or her expectations are too high. He said that he has never personally found it to be a problem.

Shirley acknowledged that her standards may cause criticism:

> Probably some people feel that I have high standards for the staff. I expect everybody to have a lot of energy and be healthy and like their jobs and like kids. I think it must drive people crazy. You know, that's fair enough. I accept that.

From my observations, everyone worked hard to meet the standards set, and little if any criticism was stated.

Leadership

After spending an extended period in Jasper Place High School, I realized how much of the school reflects the influence of Shirley Stiles. To consider leadership only as something that the principal has or does would miss much about the school. It is clear that over the past five years Shirley has used her influence in all aspects of the school. She has not had to be part of every situation to have her presence felt. As well, because of her open philosophy, everyone in the school and in the school community has understood what the school represents.

It is intriguing that all staff have understood so clearly in what direction the school is going. Some staff have credited Shirley's leadership to her teaching ability as well as her wide reading and expansive interests. Comments such as

> I know she does a lot of reading, so I think she's constantly taking information in. I don't know how many other administrators stay up on the current trends as much as she does. She always seems to know what's going on, whether she's quoting Sergiovanni or

> talking about a recent article. I think that sort of flourishes throughout the school. My department head gives us articles to read once in a while. I think that's healthy around here.

and "You can tell she's always thinking" were common.

The staff have felt that they have had a genuine opportunity for involvement in decisions that have affected them. Department heads have particularly been aware of the process that she has developed to gather that input. One, in comparing Shirley to other principals whom he had found "dictatorial," outlined her process:

> Shirley's model is much more; she's always five steps ahead of the people around her, but she says, "Here's what the problem is," or "Here's the direction we're heading. Here's the information I have, and this is the conclusion I've reached. When you look at the information, can you see anything that I've missed? Is where I'm going where we should be going? What's your interpretation?" Nine times out of ten everybody will agree exactly with the conclusion that she's reached. She's just three months, six months ahead of us. We don't know that information, so in a lot of ways what she brings to us, she's looking for affirmation that the direction she's going is correct. If we don't affirm that, she's very willing to take a second look at it, to modify her approach.
>
> And the neat thing about it is, when we see the information she's based her decision upon, we understand and we have a commitment to it because we have endorsed it. It takes more time, it takes more energy, and it takes a lot more personal contact. But I think she has a far greater commitment from her staff than many other people in the district.

A second department head said: "One of the first things that I would say about Shirley is that I have learned the value of process in seeing how things are going to happen. They have to happen through process." He perceived that

> Shirley knew, before we even went into this meeting, what the outcome was going to be. So what she has is a skill in involving you philosophically in a discussion that she's already thought through, and all that she's doing is bringing you along to her vision. She asks questions, and then we all throw it out on the table, because we're all thinking people. We become cohesive as to the way we should go.

An assistant principal saw her style this way:

> Shirley Stiles is a very great catalyst, and she's a very interesting lady. She's a manipulator, not a dirty word, manipulator. You can manipulate things in a science lab, and if you manipulate them well, they're really good. But the net result of her leadership style, which involves a great deal of sharing, is that she knows what she wants; and, most of the time, what she wants is what happens.

Teachers not actively involved in a leadership role have understood the process too. One teacher said of Shirley's ideas: "She's thought them through before, and she knows where she wants to go. And she manages to get the people there." Another saw Shirley's role as one of leading, aiming, and focusing the school.

Monday mornings have been set for meetings with the three assistant principals where issues are discussed, reading and tasks are distributed, and plans for the week are reviewed. The administration team has flagged any concerns of which any one of them has been aware related to staff, students, parents, or the community. What was remarkable to me about the meetings was that, even if the time was limited and Shirley knew that she had other commitments, they always began with social conversation, weekend stories, jokes, and fun before the work has started. She never once gave the impression of rushing through things.

For Shirley, the leadership team has been critical. This team has consisted of Shirley, three assistant principals, five department heads, the head secretary, the head custodian, the business manager, and the police resource officer. Adding support staff to the team has been her attempt to tie the whole school together. She has found that the leadership team "helps me keep a finger on the pulse of the staff."

The process that has been used to gather input for decisions is nonconfrontational. Gathering information before selecting an option has taken planning. Shirley has gathered an incredible amount of information which she has obtained from a variety of sources. She spoke of the "buttons that you push to find the information" and said that she has relied on students, parents, and the community as well as the total staff to provide her with the information. "It helps if you've been in place for a few years," she admitted.

Once the information has been gathered, she develops a plan. This plan is considered in light of her philosophy, and she selects what she perceives as the best option to solve the problems. Shirley's plan has been to use strategies which focus the input on enhancing an option which she has selected, rather than offering choices between options. She has not discussed issues which are not negotiable in a way that opposing views have been possible. To illustrate, this fall Shirley faced a budget dilemma that arose because of even deeper cuts than had been anticipated. After gathering all the information in consultation with others, Shirley felt that she would have to declare teachers surplus to the needs of the school after the first semester. Once this plan was in place, all discussions focused on how to do this with as much sensitivity as possible. The discussion did not focus on other ways to eliminate the budget deficit. She used her leadership team to focus on the strengths and weaknesses of her plan. Their energies were directed at making the plan as palatable as possible.

Her philosophy has been so strong and her decisions so consistent, that everyone knows, almost as soon as an issue has arisen, what side Shirley will be on. They may not know what the solution will be, but they will know what factors will have priority.

She also believes that when tough decisions have been necessary, a plan has been critical. The 1994-95 budget for the school was $1,200,000 less than it had been in 1993-94. Before she brought the information to staff at a staff meeting, she spoke to one of the teachers known for his insightful questions. She asked him to ask her if she had a plan when she brought up the issue. He asked, she said that she did, and immediately the level of anxiety dropped at the meeting. She believed that the staff needed to know that there was something ready to deal with this crisis, even if they did not, at that time, know what it was.

The process that Shirley has used to make decisions has been one which requires that the staff be in basic agreement with her philosophy. With a teaching staff of almost 100 individuals, it is not hard to imagine that there have been those who have not subscribed to her beliefs. Over the past five years, the small number who have not been willing or able to accept her philosophy have left. However, staff who accept the boundaries of Shirley's philosophy find comfort in the freedom they are given within those boundaries. Trust is very much in evidence.

Any staff who have been hired at Jasper Place must be philosophically in tune with the school. The process has been a fascinating one. Two student ambassadors have met each applicant one-half hour before their interview was scheduled. Each applicant was taken on a tour of the building by the students, and following the tours, the ambassadors have been asked to write about each of the applicants. The writing has been free; no guidelines have been provided. What has become clear to Shirley is that students have an incredibly good sense about which individuals would be comfortable at J. P. and with which individuals they would be comfortable. Shirley has also met with each applicant, and her questions, rather than looking for teaching expertise, have been designed to see if the applicant was a team player.

The staff at Jasper Place who do not fit the philosophy have been encouraged to change. One of the assistant principals, in discussing teachers who lacked the flexibility that has become the norm at Jasper Place, said:

> We work with them. We work with them because, you see, those people probably haven't had the opportunity to do other things. We don't force a change on someone, wap! We say, "We'd like to give you something different this year. We'll give you assistance." So we work with existing staff. And usually if they are really uncomfortable with what we're asking them to do, they will volunteer to transfer themselves. And it's not that we've pushed them on; it's just for them to be comfortable in this school, they have to be flexible. They have to.

Shirley recalled one teacher during her first year at Jasper Place who was very vocal in her criticism. She indicated opposition to Shirley's plans, and when Shirley indicated that she might wish to voluntarily transfer from Jasper Place, the teacher said that she would outlast Shirley. Shirley commented: "With the history of principals at Jasper Place, she no doubt thought that was realistic." The teacher left at the end of the second year.

The tight budget has decreased the number of staff, enabling those who wished to transfer to do so and forcing some who did not wish to leave to go. As well, in June 1994 a resignation incentive was offered by the school district, and 12 teachers chose to resign. Shirley indicated that approximately 10% of the staff have changed each year. She views change as healthy, but many of those leaving in the past couple of years have not been replaced.

For those who have subscribed to the philosophy of the school and who have demonstrated their skills, a tremendous amount of autonomy has been granted. One of the assistant principals described the freedom:

> This is a place where I believe everybody who works in the place knows what the job is. I think the job description, the task definition, is very, very clear. And we each have our separate

> areas of responsibility. I also know, while I'm primarily responsible for these certain things, there is a tremendous support base. But after the job description is arrived at, she gets the hell out of the way and lets us do the job. She re-enters the picture again to see how things are going and is very supportive along the way. You know when she takes her gloves off, she's got thirty fingers on each hand.

The department heads have seen that autonomy too. One of them stated that Shirley has respected the personal autonomy and the professionalism of teachers, and has provided that autonomy based on trust:

> There is a tremendous amount of autonomy, and I think I have that because Shirley trusts me. She understands how I operate, and I think she trusts me enough that she said to me, "You've got a little junior high school; why don't you run it that way?" And that's what I do.

A second department head described his freedom:

> Not only Shirley, but I think that the other administrators give you freedom to go out and spread your wings and do what you need to do. But I am also very aware that they are not letting you run without watching very carefully how you are running. But over the years there has been a level of trust built up, and the department has evolved to the point where we're a free-standing department. In my estimation, we make decisions down here by ourselves, within the philosophy of the school. Shirley is very comfortable that we understand, so when I go back to say where we're going, she says, "Thank you so much, that's a great initiative. Run."
>
> I think one of the great things that Shirley does is that she not only has empowered me to that particular level, but she's given me the responsibility to empower my people.
>
> And what I see as my job here now is to listen to what is happening with the philosophy. Go out and have a few beers with the administration, and listen very carefully as we toss ideas back and forth. I think that I provide as many new ideas as I get from others these days. It makes it easier and better for all of us because we're enriching each other.

A third department head used statements such as "so much free rein to make decisions," "the room to manoeuvre," and "what I'm doing is mine." He commented that he has made mistakes, but they were his mistakes to make.

When I asked Shirley to uncover the secret of who has become autonomous and how this has occurred, I had some specific issues to discuss. One was the daily publication of the *J.P. News* which has been read to each class by the advisor teacher. One of the support staff has prepared that, with no monitoring. How did this begin? She responded:

> I think when I first came here, I didn't step away from anything. I think I did involve myself in all those things. The *J.P. News* was one of the things that bothered me. I believed there was stuff in there that shouldn't be. So the first year I went through it very carefully. I have total confidence now that if there is a controversial item in there, it will be brought to me, and someone will say, "Do you think we should put it in or not put it in?" So they have taken ownership of that so I can step away.

The second issue that has been given to the individual departments has been all the funds for professional development. Was this always the case?

> When I came to Jasper Place, I felt very uncomfortable about professional development. There was no real process, and what happened was, you went to the principal for money and he gave it to you. Presumably when it ran out, it ran out, but no one really knew how or why. That was the first year. It just didn't work when I made the decisions, so I had no difficulty stepping away from that.
>
> The money went to the department heads, and each department decided how they would spend their money. It had to tie into the school priorities, and you had to present when you came back. The departments determine, and I really don't care. They decide although I get to sign the forms, so I know where people are going and people tell you where they are going. We always have money left over. So it's been very, very good. The staff satisfaction with professional development on the district survey is about 95%.

Shirley has seen this autonomy as a matter of trust. It has been able to happen because of the sharing that has gone on among everyone. When a group of 35 school personnel came to Jasper Place from Los Angeles, Shirley did a short presentation with the group. Then she said: "I divvied everybody up so someone went with the custodian, someone went with the counsellor, and so on. It was really interesting how they just took off and sort of took over the whole school, and whoever they saw, they talked to."

She has given this freedom and sense of responsibility to all staff. The head secretary said that she has been given a great deal of freedom, authority, and support. If someone in the support staff has needed professional development to enhance her performance, that too has been available. Shirley noted:

> I felt one of the secretaries was lacking in interpersonal skills. She's a great worker, so we had a frank discussion, and I said, "You know, I think you need a p.d. day. We all need those kinds of things." So we sent her off on "How to Handle the Public," and it was great. She went with the right attitude. I said, "Have a great day. Enjoy your lunch. Go and learn and come back and tell us what we could do."

But responsibility and independence have been goals for the students too. Many support systems have existed for students, but everything has been geared to teaching students to take responsibility for their learning. When the school determined that a multicultural focus would be appropriate, steps were put into place so that students could take responsibility for multicultural celebrations.

The school has also been changing the focus for students finishing courses and being accountable. One of the assistant principals explained:

> When the kids come in here to talk to me, I tell them, "You selected the course; you're going to get a finishing mark in this course. The mark will get lower and lower if you're not going very often, but that's the price you pay. When you wanted to take this course, we did our job, responded to your wishes by organizing the school and paying a teacher to come in." So kids are starting to get a message about the price tag for responsibility.

Another component of leadership has been the responsibility of the principal to be the instructional leader. Shirley's philosophy of leadership includes this perception of instructional leadership:

> I think instructional leadership is ensuring that the teachers in the classrooms have the means and the support to do their jobs. Because, really, that's what it's all about. But that's saying a lot of things. It means they have to have the opportunity for professional development in cases where there are new courses.

> It means they have to have the materials and the right books so they can teach the kids. It means that they have to be comfortable with the assignment they're given. It means that they have to feel comfortable talking about their courses to other people. It means facilitating all of the things that take place in the classroom. That's instructional leadership. So that they are able to teach.

Shirley's classroom visits have been brief, often involving merely walking in and out of the rooms. She has preferred to walk by and get a feeling for what happens. She has enjoyed the classroom, and when there has been a new course, she has gone in and sat in the classroom to learn about the course. She said that she used to spend time in classrooms, but "it seems to me that in a big school, where we have other people doing the supervision of these people, it means I'm saying, 'I'm going to check on what you're doing.'"

Another aspect of her leadership has been preparing her staff for leadership roles. The staff who have been identified as having leadership potential have been given extra responsibility and nurturing by the principal:

> Anybody whom I think has got leadership potential, I check at our one-on-ones to see what their goals are, what they have planned for the next year, what they are reading or studying. I do this so they can begin to start thinking about leadership.

Shirley has also made a point of recognizing these master teachers:

> I think it's more of a personal recognition where you go and ask for advice or you thank them or you recognize them through grad or whatever it is. There are many ways to say this is a good person. We can nominate teachers for awards of excellence; they don't seem to want more.

She has also tried to have her teachers and, in particular, her leadership staff look at the bigger picture. She has encouraged professional reading and emphasized how important it is for everyone not to be too narrowly focused. She has seen her role as training them to be ready to be principals, too.

Safety and Wellness

The environment of Jasper Place has become safe and comfortable. Working to create a safe learning environment has been ongoing. With a population of 2,000 housed in one building, issues can arise which threaten the security of staff and students. However, over the past five years many things have been put into place to give the secretary confidence to say:

> I think the school is very safe. I feel perfectly safe in this school. I walk through the school every day, and I'm not afraid of the kids in the hallways, and I think that our students feel that way too. I know of other schools where the staff does not feel as safe as they do here.

The staff commented on the follow-through. One said:

> When I first came here Shirley was instituting some programs making Jasper Place a safe place to learn. Over the three years it has just continued and continued and continued. And finally now, I think, from what I know of other high schools, I would say Jasper Place is one of the best.

The change that everyone believed has had the biggest impact on safety in the school was that everyone has taught with the classroom door open. Shirley described the plan:

> Our motive for that is safety and security of the school. Our motive was that we should have adults available for students right through this school. Now every adult is available. If there is something in the hallways, a teacher can spot it and call for an administrator. If the door's closed, you don't know. What it's done, I think, is helped people feel more comfortable in the school.

There has also been a recognition that students need to be able to find adults easily. Four areas throughout the building have been staffed by adults willing to assist: the general office, the student services office, the police resource officer's office, and the custodian's office. Students have been constantly reminded that everyone in the building is there to help.

Standards at J.P. have been high, and students have been expected to behave responsibly. If rules, which have been few, have been violated, consequences have been meted out consistently. But it has been the sense of responsibility on the part of all students that has been the goal. Teachers said that that, too, is coming:

> I see a lot of change here from four years ago. I came here February 1, four years ago. My first day I was on supervision. On that first day we had a fight of about two hundred and fifty people out front. And the two of us on supervision were breaking it up. The kids didn't know me from Adam, and I had a hard time getting the combatants apart.
>
> Now I can walk down the hallways and kids know I'm a teacher. But more than that, kids will come to teachers and say, "There's going to be a problem out here. I don't think it's right." Kids themselves are taking ownership for the conduct in the school. We all know that there is in any society a segment of people who break rules, who need some kind of punishment. But what's happened is that kids have identified that themselves and said, "This is not what we want to happen in our school; can you help us stop it? There's going to be a fight."

Shirley also told of students spotting potential safety problems and coming to her with a solution:

> They came and said the parking lot is going to kill someone. There was one entrance and one exit. Kids were roaring in and out, and they said, "You are going to have someone killed. This is what we think you should do." They drew me a map of the parking lot and said, "We should build another entrance here and here, and this is probably what it's going to cost you." The drafting boys drew up the thing. Forty-five thousand dollars. We did it. What they have to see is evidence that you listen to them.

The students have also been involved with the safety and security of the school. The football team has been trained to act as security for the school. The football coach trains the boys, and they are provided with special t-shirts. They act as security at functions such as school dances and the REB Tournament. They learn how to handle people who are aggressive and want to push in. Shirley indicated that at the REB Tournament there will be as many as 2,000 spectators. Security is provided by one teacher and 20 football players. There has been no trouble because the spectators have respected the students on duty.

Students have also taken responsibility for reporting violations in the school. Two years ago Shirley was in the hallway when the following incident happened:

> Two students came up to me and said there was something funny happening in the ESL wing. "If you happen to go to lockers numbered X to Y, you'll find something interesting." We found that these kids had cleared out the metal between the lockers, so if you were into one, you were into six. They were running a break-and-enter ring out of the school at noon. And they would stash the stuff in the lockers.

Having a police resource officer on staff has enhanced the safety of the school. The staff, students, and parents have seen the role of the police officer in a positive light. Shirley has seen him as helping to build the school community, helping to ensure that it is a safe and secure place for people to be. He has been another support for the students. Sean, one of the students, agreed:

> Last year we were talking about it, how the constable did a good job in keeping crime down. Having a police officer around makes it a better environment for all the students. Having a police officer around helps us in any situations. Not just like police matters, but just as a friend, stuff like that. He'll help you with anything.

A parent on the parent committee also supported the police resource officer:

> It's great having the constable involved with the parent group as well. He comes to all our meetings, and he tells us what problems there are, or perceived problems. He also tries to take a very proactive approach to what he sees might be happening. He works very closely with Shirley on that, and the parents and the staff and the students.

The resource officer, hired through the school's budget, is in his uniform all the time. He spends two to three hours a day in the hallways, and students are very comfortable with him. When budget cuts have been a reality, the resource officer has been one individual whom everyone believed must be maintained. Shirley stressed that "everybody in this world needs a police force, in the best sense of the word. I think the police are incredibly wonderful resource people in the community who are instantly accessible."

He has worked closely with the administration and estimated that about 80% of his time has been spent with them. He has also assisted staff, students, and parents and provided help to junior high schools in the neighborhood if they have requested it. He has been a member of the leadership team and indicated that he has been involved in decisions at the school:

> With regard to some of the students, safety, alternatives to dealing with a student, or alternatives in guiding student behavior and attitudes, I do have input. Some students that we deal with are going to need involvement with the law, probation, child welfare, or with some other agency. There are some contacts with agencies that I may have that the school may not. The school may not feel free in making the contacts, so they will call upon me to make those contacts.

The constable has also assisted in the implementation of a Crimestoppers program at the school. A number of cases have been solved through anonymous tips, and what is surprising is that only two students have ever come forward to claim a cash reward. While I was in Shirley's office, a call came to her about a student who might have a weapon at school. She thanked the individual who called, commending her for an act demonstrating good citizenship, and called the resource officer. Both the resource officer and the assistant principal who had the boy in his grouping spoke with the student. In fact, the student said, he did have a knife. He also said that he knew better than to bring it to school.

To help staff know what to do in a crisis, another strategy used at Jasper Place has been inservice for the staff. Emergency plans were developed, and staff were trained. Shirley explained:

> If we perceive that there is going to be a fight, we have set up a system, and someone phones the head secretary. She alerts the administration immediately and phones the five department heads. It's not a good idea to go on the p.a. to say there's going to be a fight!
>
> The department heads immediately tell the people in their departments, and everybody steps out into the hallway, and those closest to the problem move to it. So we practice that. We also have key places where we can watch the parking lots. Any car or group of cars that comes in at, say, 1:30 p.m. is extraordinary, so we see the problem early. All the staff are part of the visibility, and I would say that the most effective guys are the custodians.
>
> I think that in the first ten minutes of the morning and afternoon, you can pick up whether the world is okay or the world isn't okay. If we think the world isn't okay, we walk. We just walk. Everybody on a spare walks. Kids can't stand it. It ruins the whole scheme.

The staff does supervision at Jasper Place. Shirley preferred to call it "increased visibility." Supervision happens before school, during the noon hour, and after school, with the administration taking an active role. Unlike many high schools, Jasper Place teachers have supervised on the grounds during September, October, April, May, and June. The parking lots have been much safer because of this monitoring. This supervision was begun at the suggestion of the staff and is provided by volunteers.

Although strategies have been in place to ensure the safety of the students, problems have arisen and students have been expelled from Jasper Place by the school board. In the past three years about one dozen students have been expelled for a variety of reasons. Most issues have dealt with possession of weapons or severely inappropriate behavior.

The fall of 1994 was a particularly difficult time at Jasper Place because five students were expelled for a group assault on another student. The group involved was from one cultural group, and the issue was seen to have racial overtones. There was much anxiety in the school as many brothers, sisters, and cousins of those expelled remained in the school.

Threats had been made, and tension was high. Shirley spoke of the total staff commitment to return the school to normal:

> We figured that we would have to walk a month. You know that there were guys who volunteered to do the walking before school? And some people said they were here everyday until 4:00 anyway and would stick around until everybody got on a bus. Literally the whole staff walked. That's commitment. I mean that's team work. Phenomenal! But I believe that they feel it pays off, and they tell me that they feel safe.

When any serious issue has arisen, timeliness has been seen by the staff to be critical. If an expulsion has been required, the student has been suspended and the student's locker cleared. The perception has been that expulsion is immediate, in spite of the fact that extensive documentation and effort must go into the preparation of the expulsion. Students have seen the custodian cut off the lock and put everything belonging to the student into a bag. No one has doubted that violent behavior has not been tolerated.

Violence that is a part of society has also concerned the school. When students told Shirley that the biggest threat they felt was dating violence, alarm bells went off. Shirley saw it as an issue of personal safety, and plans were immediately underway to ensure that it was addressed in all classes during the second semester. Rather than waiting for the CALM curriculum to be rewritten, the administration worked with a community group, West End Community Unity, to develop a program. It will not be an add-on for teachers, but it will replace something that may have less relevance in 1995. Shirley has seen this as being responsive to student concerns.

The concern for safety and comfort has extended to a concern for the well-being of everyone in the school. A healthy lifestyle and an enjoyment of the job have been important. Shirley has monitored staff attendance and has seen staff when they have returned from an absence, particularly if the individual has been away frequently. She has asked them: "Why are you getting sick so often? Is it because you haven't been for a check-up? If there is something bothering you, maybe we can help you. You can't teach if you're not well. What can we do?"

> In *What's Happening* I told everyone to go for a check up. I put out stuff about breast cancer and prostate cancer. I think it's really important, it's part of our role, to keep people well. As a result, our attendance is better and better. Now, I'm not saying people come here sick, but I think they're doing a better job of looking after themselves.

It is a balanced life that Shirley has sought for herself and those in her care. She has tried to model a balanced lifestyle by looking after herself. She arrives at school by 6:00 each morning but leaves by 4:00. She said: "I used to leave guilty; now I leave very noisily, visibly. They need to know we have a life. So I do it on purpose. 'I'm leaving now, goodbye. See you tomorrow; don't stay too long.'"

In each of her one-on-ones with staff, she has asked what the individual has done for himself or herself. All staff have been asked to have a personal goal. She has been adamant that people have a balanced load. She stated:

> I've called some staff in and said, "You will not be coaching any more. You're tired; I want you to take a year off." And they are all upset, but they come back the next year saying that was the best thing they ever did.
>
> I think it's our job to make sure that we do that balancing, and we don't add on to teachers. If we add on, we take off.

The staff and students have valued the concern for them as people. One of the teachers told a moving story:

> I know there've been a few times when I was probably doing way too much and I was not aware of it. I can remember Shirley taking me into the office one day and saying, "People are concerned; what's going on?" And that really hit home. It was nice that she was aware, that she had tuned in.
>
> It was a bad time of the year. I had lost a son and it was around his birthday, and that's always a bad time. But it probably

> took ten minutes for her to sit down. We both cried and shared that sort of stuff. I knew after that point that she was sort of looking over my shoulder. She never stepped in and said it was time to stop something, but it was just the awareness that she was there. That's one key memory I will always have of Shirley—the kleenex and the closed door. She always knows when to close the door.

While one of the department heads was meeting with Shirley, she told Shirley about a personal situation with one of the teachers. Afterwards the department head said that she wanted me to know that "it wasn't to gossip; but we understand what is happening in her classroom, and we're there if we need to assist her. That's what I see as the role of department head."

Perhaps one of the Grade 12 students said it best: "She really keeps an eye out on everybody. She's like a watchful mother. She's got two thousand children, and she looks after every one of them."

The budget for professional development has not been cut as a result of general budget cuts. Shirley argued:

> I think that too often we make the mistake of cutting that part back. And what we're actually saying is that "you have to work harder, it's going to be tougher, and we're not providing any renewal for you." But we're also looking for cheaper ways to do things.

A workshop was held at Jasper Place during exam week after the first semester for all teachers of Math 31 in the district. As Shirley said: "It was cheap; cost nothing. I think we need to promote more of that."

Optimistic, Positive Approach

Words such as "positive," "happy," and "optimistic" have been used frequently at Jasper Place. Even though it is a large school, expressions such as "We're all one happy family here"; "The whole school feels optimistic, and if you feel good, then you're going to try to be even better"; "We work towards a very positive end"; "I see the school as being one of the most positive"; and "If Shirley sees that it is a detriment or negative to our school, then she won't do it" have come from staff, students, and parents.

Shirley has used humor to maintain the positive tone. One of the assistant principals reflected:

> Shirley sets those seeds of positive behavior. Sometimes I'll make a decision and she'll say, "Does that make sense?" or "What do you think that would do to the kids if we did that?" Or I'll be angry at a student and I'll go stomping in and she'll say, "Oh, there's the one we should take out and hang out in the field!" She always puts things into perspective.

Many also commented on the fact that Shirley has never been in a bad mood. "She's always got a smile on her face"; "I've never seen her grumpy"; and "There's always a welcome smile on her face, and you always feel good coming to work" have been frequent observations.

When I asked Shirley to tell me about her moods, she said:

> Very seldom am I in a bad mood. I'm not a bad-mood person. When I started a long time ago, I knew that every day is kind of a bonus, and they've all got something different to offer. I also know that if I am in a bad mood or if I'm depressed, or if I get myself overwrought, I can see the effect on others immediately. I don't remember ever being an unhappy kind of person. I think my critics say that I'm too optimistic. So you would probably hear that I'm a Pollyanna.

The staff have feared losing her. Last spring Shirley was on the short list for the superintendency of Edmonton Public Schools. The staff were torn. Questions such as "Can this tone that we have in the school become the tone for the district?" were balanced with "How long will we be able to maintain the momentum if she leaves?" In September 1995 they will have the opportunity to answer that question. Shirley will leave Jasper Place to take a position in the district's central office.

Visibility, Accessibility

The Jasper Place leadership team has made it a priority to be visible. One of the reasons has been to ensure that everyone feels safe. As well, the tone of the school has been enhanced by staff, students, and parents seeing that all the leadership team cares about the school. One of the staff pointed out that this is not the case in every high school:

> I know that I've been in a couple of high schools where I've taught Grade Twelve students. There is an announcement to "Please see Mr. or Ms. So and So," one of the assistant principals, and students will ask, "Who's that?" That's not the case here, ever. The assistant principals are always on hallways. There's a recognition of people.

The police resource officer credited Shirley with this visibility:

> She leads by example. Take, for example, the fact that the administration and some of the staff are out meeting the kids in the morning, greeting them when they come, walking around in the daytime, and ensuring the kids are where they're supposed to be, walking around at lunchtime, and also out at the end of the day. I think that is a real motivator for people who work in this school.

The staff have valued the opportunity to "bump into" Shirley in the school and have often been able, in just a moment, to share information with her that they might not have if they had had to make an appointment. With open doors in classrooms, the staff have noticed when she has been out and about.

Everyone commented on her attendance at all other events at the school. One of the students said:

> Mrs. Stiles is really involved in everything. We, our volleyball team, won the city conference championship on a Saturday, and she came out to watch. When I'm involved in drama productions, I know she goes to those. She's probably more involved than most of the students in the school.
>
> It's good that she comes to watch the games and everything. You always see Mrs. Stiles there. She drags all the teachers out and everything. You always see her in the stands. Even for our late games at night, she's there.

The staff and parents also commented on her attendance at every function and her support for all school activities. The athletic coaches have really appreciated her support and attendance at their games.

The students have also appreciated how accessible she is. "You can usually find her in the hallways, because she's always walking around. Or else you can make an appointment, I guess," said one student. Another told me:

> Come to her about anything, even if she is busy, she'll take a time out for you. She's really good. You knock on the door, if she's with someone, she will just talk to them for a few minutes and come to you right away. We've all done that. She always puts time away for her students.
>
> What do we see her about? Just general stuff, like what we need for sports or something like that. Or just to talk to her, just to see how she's doing. We always just come in and talk to her. That's the kind of lady she is.
>
> In Grade Ten a bunch of us were trouble makers, and she talked to us. And she straightened us out. After that, we're all a little better. She talked to us straightforward, like she respects us. She understood our point of view and then asked us what we should do about the situation. She agreed with us, and we solved the problem.

Shirley acknowledged that her visibility has a purpose. When she first arrived at Jasper Place she spent the first semester figuring out how the world worked and just making herself visible. Whether it was staff or students, she knew that they would be watching her, too. Once the individuals began to feel comfortable around Shirley and saw that she was genuinely interested, they began to talk, to answer her questions. Shirley could tell that the students were feeling comfortable when they came to see her. That visibility has continued on a daily basis.

Visibility for everyone has been encouraged, so, as Shirley pointed out: "If you say that visibility is important, then you'd better be visible." Her visibility has been strategic. She has tried to make herself visible when she has attended games by sitting behind the players' bench where she could speak with the parents. Even though her stay has been brief, it has been noted. She also has made a commitment to be visible within the school district and the community. However, she has always been sure to tell the staff when she would be out of the school. She has always given them follow-up as well.

The components of her philosophy and beliefs have underlaid everything that has happened at Jasper Place. Over the past five years she has instilled much of her philosophy, not only in her staff, but also in her students and their parents. There have been few individuals at Jasper Place who could not state what has been important to the principal and the staff.

People and Relationships

Shirley enjoys people. She is in her best form when she is around others, and she is a skilled relationship builder. The concept of team, one she strongly supports, has been important at the school. Shirley listens actively and asks good questions. Rather than asking one of the assistant principals, "Which part of the school do you think we should lease to the sports medicine clinic?" she frames the question, "Have you considered the old home economics lab as the site to recommend for the sports medicine clinic?" Her question predisposes his answer.

She knows the importance of personalizing the school. Support systems have been put into place to assist students in being successful. People have had a sense of involvement and have seen themselves as being treated fairly, with dignity, and with humor.

The Team

"It would be impossible to run a plant this size if you didn't have a team." Shirley maintained that the most critical thing she had to do when she arrived at Jasper Place was to build a team. Operating in isolation would have made the job overwhelming, if not impossible.

There are now various "teams" which operate within the school. The administration team has consisted of Shirley and the three assistant principals. They have met weekly to keep each other up to date. They have also chatted informally on a daily basis, and individual one-on-ones have occurred weekly as well. The leadership team has included the administration team, the department heads, the business manager, the head custodian, the head secretary, and the police resource officer. This group has met before school once every two weeks. Faculty Council, an extension of the leadership team, has included anyone who was interested and has met monthly, as has the entire staff. Faculty Council has served as a sounding board for issues to be taken to the entire staff. By inviting all interested staff to Faculty Council, those who have wanted to air their views in a smaller setting have had that opportunity. Meetings have been short, never more than an hour, and the agenda has focused on information sharing and processes to be undertaken. The staff said that they have appreciated the opportunity to be involved and have extended the teaming notion throughout the school. The custodian and the head secretary spoke of their teams, and each department head has used that model as well.

The CTS department head, who has had responsibility for a wide range of subject areas, explained: "I want the department to work together as a homogeneous group, rather than as one small group on their own and another small group on their own." Another described a facet of his role:

"There's the side of trying to encourage some kind of camaraderie and team building among them. Rather than having people off on their own tangent, I try to get people to cooperate and make a unified group." The terms *collegial* and *very close-knit group* were common.

Teachers have felt a closeness at the school in spite of its size. One of them commented that it has been "intimate" in the school in spite of the large numbers of people. Another teacher credited Shirley with this feeling:

> She makes everyone feel that they are part of a team. And that's sort of a corny word to bring up, but I really feel that the majority really feel that they are part of a team, and they really like to work for her.

A third said, "When we put together a plan, it really is our plan. There's an ownership to being here, both students and staff. I never experienced that in other schools."

The team concept has also allowed for the development of a strong sense of loyalty to the school and its principal. One of the students told of Shirley demonstrating that team spirit. There had been a fan challenge at one of their football games. Not only had their team lost the game, but Jasper Place also lost the fan challenge because they had fewer spectators. The deal had been that the principal of the losing school would wear the colors of the other school for one day. Even though the student said that the other school's colors were ugly, Shirley wore them. She endured some good-natured teasing from everyone as well.

Many people have remembered their experiences at Jasper Place with fondness. Thank you letters have come to the school from former staff and students. Shirley has published them in her weekly *What's Happening.* Comments have included: "You have a great staff there, like one big happy family"; "I consider the Jasper Place staff as a family, and we have had to weather some storms"; and "You all at J.P. gave me something I hadn't had before. That's confidence as a person. Just tell the staff at J.P. they are the best group of teachers that any school could have."

The annual district attitude survey given to students in the spring of 1994 indicated that

96% of the students were satisfied with their teachers,
95% of the students felt safe in school,
92% of the students felt that they were receiving adequate information about what they were expected to learn, and
92% of the students were pleased with the school in general.

The team seems to be working together successfully to meet the needs of those they serve.

Listening, Asking Questions

Shirley has a comprehensive knowledge about Jasper Place. Many people commented on how much she knows about what is going on. She appears always to be on top of everything. Some of them have even come to realize how she has been able to become so aware. One of the assistant principals commented:

> One thing that I see as being successful for Shirley is that she has open communication. She meets twice a year with each and every staff member. It allows her to gain a lot of information about the staff member, and she does it in a very informal way.
>
> I think she encourages staff members to be open and honest with her and come to her with concerns. I would guess that in talking to any staff member about Shirley, they would say she's open and she's honest and she doesn't hide anything. That comes across on a regular basis. I think the staff have learned that she's trustworthy, and I think they appreciate the fact that she handles things in the way she does. She never tries to gloss things over.

A teacher noted:

> I don't know how she does it. She never writes anything down. I have to write things but she seems to remember. Maybe she goes back to her office and writes it down after we talk to her. But she has a sense of what's going on. She just has a sense of knowing whether it's something on the sixth floor in the art department, or in automotives.

A parent commented on how she listens to the students:

> She seeks to understand students. I often hear students say, "Oh yeah, well she says, 'How do you REALLY feel about it?' or 'How do you REALLY think about this?'" Instead of just listening to the initial response to her comments or concerns, she goes deeper with them.

Shirley knows the value of being well informed. When I asked Shirley to share how she knows so much, she responded:

> I think part of it is that you have people who give you information. When you are working with three assistant principals, they pick up things. And when you are working with a secretary like Elke, that's a source of information. And then there are people in the school who just give you information because they're just that kind of people. I think you also probably develop a plan of how you would go out and find information. I hear from students and parents too.
>
> When I first got here, I asked a lot of questions. I didn't make any changes for the first semester; I just asked questions: "Why are we doing this? Is there a reason why things are like this?" And when people figure out that you are genuinely interested, they start to give you the reasons. If you've used that information, they'll give you more information.
>
> It's being interested. And not just going in to change things for the sake of change, but changing them because there is a really good reason.

Things seem to happen with extensive listening and genuine questions.

Shirley told of the need for patience:

> When I tried to put in the advisor program in this school, there was real reluctance. So I just kept saying, "Why shouldn't we?" People would give me their reasons why we shouldn't, and I would try to think of answers to them. But in the end the staff said, "Why don't we have an advisor program?" So in that case I had to learn to give them time to absorb one of my ideas. It's a matter of timing.

Her listening and insightful and probing questions have also been able to uncover trouble spots. This spring Shirley sensed trouble in one of the departments. Two departments had been combined under one department head, and she felt that there was some tension. Her strategy was to check her perceptions with one or two members of the team. When they confirmed the problem, she first had a meeting with the department head, followed by individual meetings with each member of the department. Her purpose was to identify the cause of the unhappiness, determine what was going to be done about it, and find out what she was going to see from each of them that would tell her that the issue had been resolved. She said: "I am going to concentrate on those guys, so that's going to be all of my appointments for the next little while, dealing with their problem." After everyone had been seen, a department meeting was held. Following her meetings she commented:

> They did very, very well. In fact the resolution came really in the one-on-ones, so by the time we got to the final meeting, everyone felt that they've been heard, that some of their concerns were valid, but that it was a two-way process. Some minor things were agreed on at the meeting. There's been nothing since. It was important for them to feel that someone had noticed something wasn't right.

She also notices when things are not said. She knows that something is wrong if no one asks questions. She has been careful to monitor the silences as well as the comments. She pointed out that if the staff are not talking to her, she can be sure that they are talking to each other in the parking lot.

Shirley has used questions to gather information from other sources as well. She is confident that there is expertise around the school or the district to assist with any problems. She illustrated:

> I think you've got to use the expertise that's around. I think that if you don't phone people and check things out, or ask for advice, you're crazy. So I'm quite happy to do that. And I do quite a lot of that.

> For example, when we had the situation of looking at which contract we wished for beverages, I could get someone in who had worked with these guys and knew how to ask the right questions. I learned from that.
>
> I didn't know about contracts for our daycare. I brought somebody from the school board to help me come up with the questions. When I was concerned about the budget, I went and spent the day with Internal Audit and asked them questions so I could learn about the questions I should be asking them.
>
> When I went to my first principalship, I didn't know how you know the school was clean. So I spent a day with the custodial consultant and said, "Tell me the questions to ask so I know it's being cleaned."
>
> It's like some people go to the doctor and don't know what questions to ask, so they come away feeling uncomfortable. We need a better way of training people to ask the right questions, because there are lots of things we don't know.

I saw as I spent time with Shirley that she spent much more of her time asking questions rather than providing answers. And the questions were structured in such a way that the answers she expected were forthcoming.

Personalizing the School

Shirley is "a people person." She enjoys being around people and is always concerned that they are comfortable. The advisor program at Jasper Place has been one strategy that has personalized some of the routines that are needed at high school. Each student who is scheduled for a class in the second period has that teacher as his or her advisor. All formal communications, career counselling, registration, and gathering of student input have happened in that program. Shirley believes that this personalizes the school because at any time you can find out from any advisor what 30 students think. And one advisor is responsible for ensuring that 30 students are informed and comfortable in the school.

Another structure put into place to make the school a more personal place has been that students have been assigned a coordinator, not according to their grades, but alphabetically by their surnames. Assistant principals get to know students over the years they are at the school, begin to know families, and when the registration group is together there are Grade 11s and 12s who can provide assistance to the new Grade 10s.

There has been a welcoming atmosphere at Jasper Place. One parent said: "I'm in here quite often, and I always feel extremely welcome. All the vice principals, and everyone, are just great. And they have wonderful comments for us. They thank us and thank us, again and again."

The telephone has been used regularly to personalize the school. Each Grade 10 student about to begin at Jasper Place has received a welcome call the week before school begins. These students' parents would have been called in the spring to welcome them to the school's Open House. Every parent has also received a call before all the Meet the Teacher Nights. Over 1,200 parents have attended each Meet the Teacher Night. The advisors phone the parents of students they advise, and teachers who do not teach in period two and the administration phone all the parents of students who do not have a second-period class. Shirley has enjoyed the opportunity to do her share of the phoning because parents have always told her everything else they thought she should know about the school at that time. Shirley has also returned parents' calls within 24 hours.

As well, staff commented on the personal touches at the school. When Shirley has met with the student teachers and heard some of the good things that have happened in the classrooms, she has been sure to go back to the teacher with a compliment and an encouragement to share the good things with colleagues.

One teacher told of the reason he came to Jasper Place:

> I had my interview, and I left not quite knowing if I wanted to work at Jasper Place because I had a very secure position. I remember leaving with one question to the committee that was interviewing me: "If I come to Jasper Place, how long is this position going to be available for me?" They couldn't answer that question for me.
>
> Well, I got a call that night from Shirley Stiles, about 9:30 or 10:00 at night. It was right after Open House or Awards, very late at night. She said she realized I had a question about the position, assured me it was not a short-term position, and offered me the job. So, because of that phone call, I decided to come to Jasper Place; otherwise, I had second thoughts about it. But it was that personal touch that she had given. It was quite phenomenal, I thought; so here I am.

Honors students, too, have received personalized treatment in the form of honors lunches. Each term a separate lunch has been held for each grade, and every student who has achieved an average of 80% or more in three of the four courses they have taken in that semester has been on the honors list. Every student has been given the same opportunity to achieve honors, irrespective of the courses taken. All students' names have been read over the intercom 15 minutes before the lunch break, and the students have gone to the staff cafeteria, where hands are shaken and they are welcomed by the administrative team, who join them for lunch.

The head secretary said that Shirley knows many of the students. She knows their names. One of the students confirmed this:

> I'm surprised how she knows everybody's name. She'll say "Hi" to everyone and use their names too. And she's really friendly. She's always making sure everyone is out of the halls. She's always walking the halls, getting to know people.

One mother shared this story which demonstrates Shirley's personal involvement in her son's life:

> Shirley asked him to speak at an Education Society meeting. She picked him off the honor roll. He was a fourth-year student, and I just thought it was very sharp of her to pick him out. He had repeated the CALM course three times; the first two times he just could not identify with the course at all. The third time he got

> 90-something, because his teacher happened to be someone that he believed gave him the right information; that he was qualified to give him the information.
>
> So when he thought about speaking to the group, he just didn't know what to say. She was really good. She took him out to the Faculty Club first and then to the meeting at the Mayfair Golf and Country Club. He was well treated. But he was wondering what he should say. He told me the other two girls speaking at the meeting were so perfect, and their speeches were so exact, and they were excellent students. They had made it through Grade Twelve in three years, and they had no problems.
>
> I said, "Ray, she picked you for a reason. Just speak from your heart. They need to hear what you went through." And that's what he did. He had one man come up to him and say, "Ray, I have a special spot in my heart for you."
>
> She was really pleased and proud of what he had to say up there. You know, he was very honest and open, and she backed him all the way. He didn't feel like he had to say anything because of guidelines she set on him. She was very perceptive and said she always enjoyed watching him in the hallways. I think it's called unconditional love. She just absolutely acts in the best interest of the child. I think that's magic.

But the one thing that was known by every staff, student, and parent in the school was the famous "Shirley Note." Last year the secretary calculated that she had written 3,500 notes to students. The staff and parents get notes as well. I, too, received a note from Shirley while I was at Jasper Place, a sympathy note when my mother passed away.

Students have appreciated hearing from her. When asked about receiving a note from Mrs. Stiles, one student shared:

> Yup, every year on sports. She says she's proud that we made the team and how much we've done and what we've accomplished. It's just a card, and she fills it out, and she just basically says good stuff.
>
> It's important. Everyone gets it, and they're happy. At first, they think they're in trouble. In Grade Ten when I got one, it was, "Oh, no, what's this!" But then you're really kind of happy about it. It's really good that you know she's thinking about you.

Another student had this to share:

> She takes the time to review your report card, and will actually write you a personal note. To every student who has achieved honors standing! In Grade Ten that just baffled me. I just couldn't believe that. So finally this year I said, "I'm going to write her a note back saying from the students how much we

> appreciate that," because I'm sure it means a lot to every single student who gets those cards. I've got a stack about three inches high at home from all kinds of things. It's just really good. I've got them for acting in the school plays, playing on the sports teams, being an ambassador for the school.

Parents have appreciated the recognition that their students have received. She has often heard such comments as "You won't know what that note meant"; "You'll never believe all the notes pinned up on the board"; "You know, Mrs. Stiles, you greeted my son twice yesterday, and you knew his name"; or "You shook his hand because he did something." Parents have also received notes thanking them for their contributions to the school.

The staff have found the special notes meaningful as well. She remembers them at Christmas, Valentine's Day, and other special times such as birthdays. They have appreciated the recognition. One teacher commented:

> One thing really makes me feel good working for Shirley. If I am able to do something for her, there is always a thank you note the next day. And it's a small thing, but she takes the effort to do it. Then you know, "Hey, she appreciated what I did." I have quite a collection of them at home. My kids look at them, and my wife looks at them, and they say, "Holy, that sure must be nice to work in a place where you really know you're appreciated."
>
> Every time I get one of these, I just read it and think, "Geez, thanks, Shirley. That's good, that's really good." And it's every time. She never, never forgets. I don't know how she does it, because I'm just one, and she probably writes out dozens of thank you cards every day to people who have helped her or supported her.

When I asked Shirley about this mammoth task she set for herself, she acknowledged that she does write a lot, but she also enjoys it. It is not a chore; it's a daily task, done when she arrives at 6:00 each morning. She indicated that she used to send typewritten letters but now writes everything by hand. She joked that the students cannot read her writing so they just make up what they want.

She acknowledges everyone who has been successful in school or in the community. Each note is personalized. She reviews report card marks when preparing the notes for the honors students and actually specifies where they did exceptionally well and where they should improve. She explained her motivation:

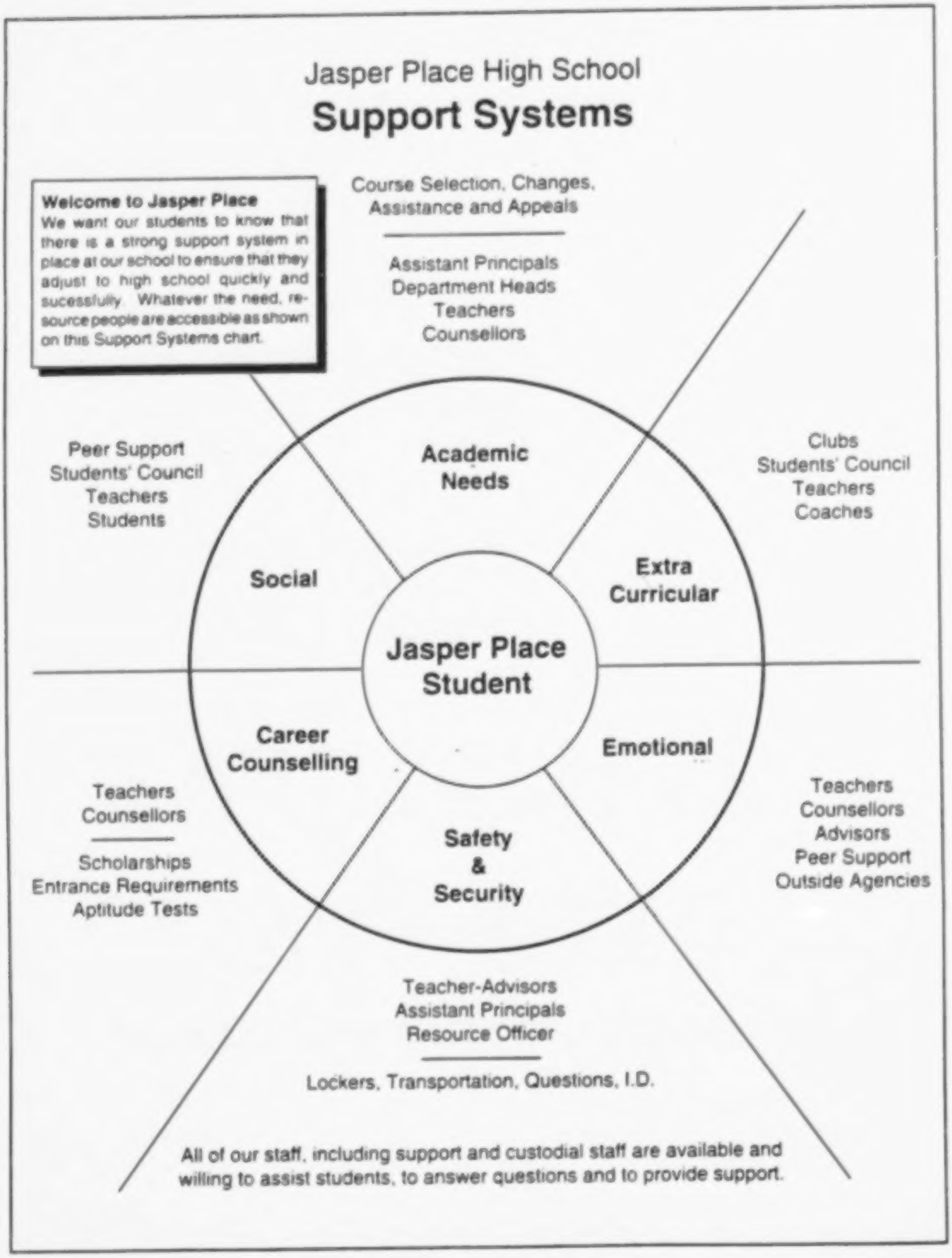
> I think it's important that they know that we care about them. One of my things is that in a big school, if we can't personalize, we're in trouble. I'm a note writer. I write to kids every opportunity I get. I encourage teachers to tell me about things I should acknowledge.
>
> Part of it is, I think kids should be proud of what they achieve, so if they get a note out of the ordinary, distributed in advisor period, they get to shine. I wrote a note to a kid yesterday. "Why did you get a note, Dylan?" the students asked. The teacher said, "Dylan won the novice ice-dancing gold medal in Halifax. I bet that's what the note was." So they had a whole class discussing Halifax. Kids seem to be quite happy to share it. We like to talk about what we're okay at.

And Shirley makes sure that everyone is aware of other's strengths.

Support Systems

Jasper Place High School has had support systems in place to assist students, staff, and parents. To support the academic needs of students, a learning assistance teacher has been available. The school has been a district site for the learning disabled, but there has been a belief that you can access help whether you have been identified as learning disabled or not. Some students have received help for their entire high school career; others have come for assistance for a short period of time. Those students registered in the Pilot program have received help from this teacher during the second year of their program.

Student-support systems have extended to the total high school experience. A section of the Registration Guide (see Figure 1) gives students the systems that exist and who to see to address their needs. The


Jasper Place High School
Support Systems
Course Selection, Changes, Assistance and Appeals
Assistant Principals
Department Heads
Teachers
Counsellors
Academic Needs
Peer Support
Students' Council
Teachers
Students
Social
Clubs
Students' Council
Teachers
Coaches
Extra Curricular
Jasper Place Student
Career Counselling
Teachers
Counsellors
Scholarships
Entrance Requirements
Aptitude Tests
Emotional
Teachers
Counsellors
Advisors
Peer Support
Outside Agencies
Safety & Security
Teacher-Advisors
Assistant Principals
Resource Officer
Lockers, Transportation, Questions, I.D.

Welcome to Jasper Place
We want our students to know that there is a strong support system in place at our school to ensure that they adjust to high school quickly and sucessfully. Whatever the need, resource people are accessible as shown on this Support Systems chart.

All of our staff, including support and custodial staff are available and willing to assist students, to answer questions and to provide support.

Figure 1. Jasper Place High School support systems.

school staff constantly remind students of the support systems available and try to make it comfortable for students to get the assistance they need. At Shirley's February 14th assemblies, each group of students was reminded of the support systems and encouraged to take advantage of all the adults in the building.

The 1995-96 school budget has an objective which states: "One hundred per cent of the students will have information about educational support services in our school and will have access to opportunities to successfully complete their course of study." The number of students requesting support assistance will be tallied, and the district attitude survey will indicate the level of student satisfaction with the services available.

The staff were confident that support was there for them as well. One believed that Shirley "takes people under her wing." Another said:

> It boils down to Shirley being supportive of initiatives that maybe some other school probably wouldn't jump into with quite as much enthusiasm. So I know I appreciate it. When you're embarking on a new initiative, she's always for you. I mean, she just never says no. She makes time, and even if I know she's really, really busy, she'll say yes. And she'll take two or three minutes, come in and do her thing, and then get back to what she's doing. And she always does it with a smile on her face.

Shirley's support for staff initiatives has been based on the confidence that she has had in the staff's professionalism:

> I think that there are very few staff who do not take their jobs seriously. When new curriculum comes out, you watch how people get together and work through it. When I look at what the science department has done in this school to get ready for the new science program, how they've moved into little teams, how they've shared, how they've gone to inservices, how they've drawn up units, how they wrote up stuff so we could talk to Grade Nines, I've been really impressed. A lot of extra work, and no extra time given for that.
>
> This year I'm looking at Career and Technology Studies. Same thing: total professionalism. They want to be on top of what they are teaching.

One of the ways the administration has supported the teachers is to remove as much of the paperwork as possible. To assist teachers in providing more individualized programming, the tracking of student progress has been done in the office. Shirley commented: "We're really conscious of trying to find ways to support them, things we can take away from them. Then they've got the energy to do the other stuff."

The staff have supported each other too. There has been a large evening custodial staff who have been in the school when the rest of the staff have gone home. Most of them do not speak much English. Both of these factors have made them feel that they have not been part of the school. To show them that they were important and a valued part of the school, the teachers in the business area volunteered to do their income-tax returns for them. In the first year, only one custodian came forward for assistance; now, almost everyone has a teacher do the calculations.

Another indication of the support the staff has had for each other is illustrated by a story about the head custodian. He has been a highly valued member of the leadership team; one of the assistant principals described him as a "godsend." When Shirley arrived at Jasper Place and got to know the custodian, he indicated that he wanted to get his high school diploma. No one in his family had graduated from high school. The staff pitched in to tutor him. When he received his diploma, Jasper Place had a celebration. His pride was exceeded only by the pride of those staff members who had worked to help. He is continuing his education, taking accounting, and Shirley checks regularly to ensure that things are going smoothly.

Parents have appreciated Shirley's support. One of the "football moms" stated that "Shirley has lined us up to do the catering for the school functions. We made some good money for the football program through that." This mother said that she thought that some of the other members of staff did not believe that they could provide the catering service, but Shirley was always confident that they would succeed.

Another parent spoke of the "overwhelming support given by Shirley and the coaches. You know she's very concerned, and very supportive."

Not only has Shirley provided support, but she has also counted on others to support her. Her assistant principals have seen their role as supporting Shirley and the staff in ensuring that students are successful learners. Shirley indicated that one of the reasons that she has been able to relax when she leaves the school in the evenings or on weekends is that she has already shared any current issues with the administration team, and a plan will be in the works. She has relied on her team and also has begun to use support from the Alberta Teachers' Association (ATA), something not common to high school administrators. One of Shirley's first request for support from the ATA occurred when she declared several teachers surplus to the needs of the school. She called the ATA, before they contacted her to question her selection, and asked them to review her process and offer their suggestions. Her approach was positive for the school and the ATA.

Involvement

People have had the opportunity to be involved in the decisions that affect them at Jasper Place. Some decisions have been delegated to the teachers and the department heads. The issue of staffing is an example. The assistant principal responsible for scheduling determines the number of courses that must be available, based on registrations. Shirley then decides, in consultation with the administration team, how many teachers will be hired for the year. Each department head is told how many courses will be offered in the department. Who teaches each course is determined by the department head and teachers, within parameters already established. If corrections need to be made by the administration, they will be, but generally the planning is done by the staff involved.

The department heads have had significant input into the decisions made. One explained:

> I try to give my best considered advice as to what I think is best for our students in this school. I really appreciate the fact that when Shirley asks for opinions and ideas, she honestly listens. I feel that what I have to say is valuable, and that makes me feel very good. I hope they consider my input valuable.

Another said: "We have the feeling that we are part of the decision-making process, and we're quite happy to be involved." A third spoke of her responsibility to share her point of view.

Although people believed that Shirley had thought through ideas and was steps ahead of them in her understanding of all the relevant information needed to make a decision, they felt that she did not prejudge the outcome of any issue. Anything they said could be influential in any decision, and in their experience their input was used continually to shape the option selected.

Other staff felt involved as well. The head secretary commented: "There is no hesitation at all in calling people in and including us in decisions that may affect us." The head custodian too saw his role as important because of his knowledge of the building. He has been given the responsibility for $250,000 to cover the building maintenance. Although the principal will still need to approve expenditures, the custodian will be responsible for the plan to allocate the dollars. This is not common practice in district schools.

Shirley maintained that staff involvement has made it easier for change to take place at the school. She illustrated:

> What impresses me is when we go to do something, like a REB Tournament, a math teacher will stand up and say, "We shouldn't dismiss all kids. All those with perfect attendance should go to the tournament, and the rest of us will teach those who don't have perfect attendance." And the rest say, "Good idea." If I had tried to impose that on the staff, I can only imagine what it would be like. It just happens now.

One of the activities that has demanded the most involvement of staff, students, and parents is the preparation of the annual school budget. Although the document is called a budget, it is more than an allocation of dollars. It is an opportunity for the school to identify the objectives it will achieve, based on the priorities set by the Board of Trustees. Objectives are required in areas of achievement, attitudes, involvement, and conduct. Shirley described the process for the staff this year:

> It's been a long process this year. Actually, we made the figures far more public. We started with the administration team, went to the leadership team, gave the staff the broad information comparing last year to this year.
>
> What we did was look at last year's objectives and say, "Which ones would we like to keep, which ones would we like to change or eliminate, and which new ones do we want?" That was decided by our whole staff.
>
> We've just been to a Faculty Council meeting and a staff meeting. But by the time it gets to the staff meeting the decisions are pretty well made because it had been confirmed with Faculty Council and the leadership team. The leadership people are very much involved this year. I asked each department who would like to work on the details for which objective, so in fact, departments took ownership for the objectives.

Students have had the opportunity for input through their advisor class. Parents have been involved through the parents' resource group. At this year's Open House the chairman of the parent resource group was one of the speakers. He said: "Do they care about parents in this school? Out of twelve objectives, eight of them tie into parents. If you don't want to be involved, don't come to Jasper Place. Don't send your kid to this school."

The chairman is a pastor of a huge church and gave advice to Shirley to increase parental involvement:

> You can do what we do. Take all the Grade Ten parents, divide them up into groups of twenty-five, and send them a personal invitation. "We would like you to visit J.P. next Tuesday morning for one hour. We will tour the school with you; you can walk the halls with us, and have a cup of coffee. If the date doesn't suit you, we will find another date that will."

Shirley reported that many parents have come to the school: fathers on their way to work, mothers who have taken time off. In the end they have all volunteered to be involved. And it is parents who encourage parents. One parent spoke of this opportunity to be involved:

> What my husband and I have both noticed is that she has a real collaborative approach, which we really appreciate. She brings in the stakeholders for decision making; I mean the students, the parents, the community. It's a whole-person approach to administration which makes everybody feel like they are contributing. We all want to see positive results, and it's incumbent on each one of us to do our part. She pays attention to what we have to say. It's unique and refreshing.

Hiring of new teaching staff illustrates the roles that the various stakeholders have played at Jasper Place. Shirley outlined the three-part process:

> When a position is advertised, we select the group to be interviewed. We ask them to come about a half hour earlier than the appointment. When they arrive, they are met by two students—ambassadors—who tour them through the school. The ambassadors then come back and write a little report on how they found the teacher, just as observation.
>
> Then they go through the committee, an assistant principal who is responsible for the department, a student, a parent, and probably a teacher from that department. They make a recommendation.
>
> I interview all candidates as well, so they come from one interview to the next. Then we have a way to judge.
>
> In my years here there was only once I disagreed with the recommendation from the committee. I went with the person I wanted, and it's worked fine. They were looking at a teacher for the job; I was looking at someone who would fit into the department.

Shirley is skilled at gathering input from everyone. Her questions are structured within a framework, and she guides the group to the result she believes is the most palatable. In meeting with one of the department heads who was concerned that academic challenge courses would be dropped, Shirley did not ask the opinion of the department head initially. She began by reaffirming her goal of meeting the needs of all students and providing appropriate programming. Her question to the department head was, "How can we be sure to maintain appropriate programming if we eliminate those courses?" When the department head affirmed the need for the courses, Shirley then asked the department head for ideas as to what could be done to ensure the academic challenge courses remained. What was interesting was that the department head volunteered her department's willingness to have larger classes in the other courses to ensure that the academic challenge courses could be continued. This had been Shirley's original plan but the department head felt at the end of the meeting that her input was significant to the decision. Shirley felt it was as well.

Fairness

In a setting with conflicting demands and many requirements, it is a challenge to be perceived as fair. Many staff commented that things are handled fairly by Shirley Stiles. In a school which operates under site-based management, the allocation of budget dollars is one area that can cause conflict. The custodian commented:

> When it comes to budget time and we're talking money, she doesn't cut you off. She seems to be fair, and if she feels that we can't do something, she'll usually give you an alternative or some other way to think about doing it. I like that about her.

One of the department heads agreed:

> She has dealt with us fairly, as she has done with everybody else in this school. And we're really happy. I think we have a much better school through it. There was quite a difference in style between principals we had before and her, I think.

Shirley's perceived fairness is combined with honesty and directness. She has created loyalty on her staff. When asked how she does this, one of the assistant principals observed:

> By being totally honest, totally fair, and totally upright. That sounds easy, but sometimes it's really difficult to bring a person in and be totally fair with him. If the principal feels that, in terms of your growth, even though you've been twenty-six years in the school, you should look for a change and try something new, I think the majority of times that goes unsaid.
>
> For Shirley it doesn't. If she really thinks that you would better serve yourself and kids by trying another school, she would talk to the person about that, starting early in the year. She'd sort of make the person comfortable with the idea and assist them to move. Typically, I think that for many staffs, they feel that if you don't like what they're doing, you'll try and transfer them. Or you'll make life hard for them. Shirley does none of that. She's very direct with people.
>
> What I've learned from her is that you can be honest and fair without causing a person to be defensive. When you work in a milieu where honesty is the most important key, people are less defensive.

Shirley combines fairness with consistent treatment of staff. "We value everyone here" was a common expression. Professional-development funds have been allocated to anyone wanting or needing some training. A newly hired groundsman was sent on a special session about looking after plants and shrubs and was as enthusiastic about his opportunity to learn as anyone else on staff.

However, Shirley spoke of the dilemmas she faces with staff and fairness. The school had just advertised for a business manager, and three of the people who applied for the job were on Jasper Place's staff. Shirley explained: "It's kind of difficult living your way through that, once you have appointed someone who is either one of the three, or none of the three." In this case, the successful candidate was from outside the school.

The timing of declaring staff surplus to the school's needs has been another sensitive task. Handling the people fairly and providing support for them when she knows they likely do not want to see her again immediately after they have heard the bad news has not been easy, particularly when Shirley knows that the staff need support at the time. It is a matter of being sensitive to their responses.

Shirley's notion of fairness is also strong with respect to students. One staff member commented:

> If you have an administrator like ours who believes in fairness and the value of the person, our school becomes a fair and valuable place. It's wonderful when our students who are typically not achievers get on the honor roll. They may have Beauty Culture, Math 14, and Science 14, but if that's what they can handle, and they do it to the very best of their ability and get on the honor roll, it's just amazing how it opens them up. Next year they try harder.

Students know through the advisor program that if they do not believe that they have been treated fairly, there is a route of appeal. Concerns go from the teacher to the department head to one of the assistant principals and, finally, to Shirley. Very few appeals have reached Shirley. She believed that it was because of the professionalism of her staff. They were able to resolve issues without her involvement. But Shirley used this marking stick:

> I just say to kids when they are really angry, "Do you feel we've been fair?" They can tell you we haven't been, but if you can see that they think you have been, then I think we've done our job. We might have been firm, but we were fair.

Pride and Dignity

All at Jasper Place have been encouraged to take pride in themselves and the school. One teacher observed that "students have a pride in being here. When I walk down the hallways here, students are friendly and receptive. They smile and they talk to you." When students' names are published in *J.P. News* and read in the advisor class, students know that extra copies of the *News* are in the office and that they are welcome to take a copy home to share with their families. Everyone is expected to be proud of accomplishments.

The school is also beginning to focus on multicultural awareness and cultural pride. Rather than accept that differences will inevitably be a cause for dispute, Jasper Place has used them as a cause for celebration. One culture has been the focus each month. In the advisor classes, students have been responsible for sharing what is of significance to their culture. The students have begun to assume ownership for providing the information through social studies classes, and the Students' Union is planning to organize some of its events around multicultural awareness. Although the cafeteria has been privately run, the staff believed that they could participate by providing ethnic foods, if they were given advance notice. Shirley has seen as her role initiating the idea, encouraging the students, and putting into place support to enable them to succeed.

The staff, too, spoke of pride in their school. One department head spoke of meeting with someone from the university and being sure to present herself in a way that would be positive for the image of the school. A teacher told the story of being invited by Shirley to host a guest from Sweden:

> I took this lady on a tour of the school and showed her the things that we're proud of. Well, the lady came back to Shirley and just beamed about the school, and about me. I told Shirley that I hadn't done anything different, and she said to me, "If you feel that way about your school, it shows when you talk to outsiders. I could feel your enthusiasm and your pride in what the school is and what it does."

Probably the proudest of Jasper Place and the people in it is Shirley herself. She has often been invited to speak about the school to schools, service clubs, professional organizations, and university classes. Her feelings for public education are equally as strong as her feelings for her school. She said:

> I think that if everybody in the public system doesn't try and advertise public education every day, we're dead in the water. So I say to people, "What can you get out of a private school that you can't get out of a public school?" And they say, "Well, in private schools you can meet with the principal." "I'm here every day. Just make the appointment." "Well, they really individualize for kids." "So do we. You bring your child here; we've got the best program you've ever seen." They perceive that there are some things that they are going to get in private schools that they won't get in public schools.
>
> Every time I go out I say, "Listen, public schools have the widest range of choices and opportunity. You can choose your school because we have open boundaries. You can go in and ask people to personalize your program. You can get all the information that you ever might want. You will have the best range of courses available." We've just got to continue saying it's a good system.

To ensure that everyone is proud to be there, it is expected that everyone is treated with respect and dignity at Jasper Place. What Shirley believes is that

> what we've got to do is to say that every course offered in the school has the same dignity. The kids taking physics should be taking electronics and feeling proud of it. But what we have done is put people in little boxes, so if you take physics, you only take calculus. We've tried to do things differently at J.P.

Society currently values university education and relegates trades to a lower status. The administration team has found that they contend with this issue regularly. One of the assistant principals saw the partnerships with community and business as a way for students to have productive and satisfying futures without a university education.

Special groups of students have been treated with dignity and encouraged to take an active role in school life. The "teen moms" have formed a support group. They did a panel presentation to the staff, speaking about what it was like to be a teenage mother and to try to carry a full load of courses at school. The staff were very appreciative of their courage. Shirley reported that this encouraged the girls to present at a nearby junior high, to tell students why they should not rush into becoming a mother.

The girls asked Shirley if they could have a room in the school to use to get together. This has been done, and one of the staff ensured that they were comfortable. Next year infants will be allowed in the daycare, so many of the students who are mothers will be able to use that service and, thus, would find it easier to get to school.

There has been a significant Native population at Jasper Place. One morning a Native social worker arrived at the school to speak with one of the support staff, a Native woman who was organizing a Native support group to assist students in developing pride in their heritage. Shirley met with them and was delighted to welcome him into the school. He will be the next one with an office in Jasper Place; Shirley offered him that option.

All students have been treated with dignity, even those whose behavior is a problem. As Shirley indicated:

> We have a time-out room, right next to my office. If a student, usually a Pilot student, is feeling a need to be distanced and on their own, staff will put them down here. Then I can keep an eye on them. And they don't feel like they are being punished. It's quite a nice place to be. But they do have a chance to get their dignity back. There is also a little room right next to the Pilot classrooms where they can withdraw.

Even the language chosen by Shirley and the staff has shown their positive attitudes towards all students. Open classroom doors also allow a student who is late to slip in. Shirley called this "inviting school success."

The staff have received the same treatment. No one is a second-class citizen. The message has been that everyone is valued. The custodian said:

> Not one job is more important than the other. I mean, we all have our roles to do in educating kids. I mean, if the room is not clean or if it's too hot or too cold, it's harder for kids to learn. So part of our job is keeping the school comfortable and clean so the students can learn easier. Shirley recognizes that, and so it helps. A lot of principals look at custodial services as an expense, not a service.

All have been expected to do their part, and every segment of the organization has been encouraged to be proud of its contribution.

Laughter, Humor, and Fun

The school is an enjoyable place to be; laughter rings in the office, the halls, and the classrooms. One of Shirley's measures has been laughter:

> If I go into an office and there is no laughter, something is not right there. We've faced some tough times in our general office. A couple of them have lost husbands. But they are wonderful because they know how to cry together and they know how to laugh together. We've got to be able to laugh, so we try to have the laughs on us. And I think that really helped when I first came in. I've done some dumb things, and I think they quite enjoyed it when I tell them. But the staff are good at that. They don't laugh at each other; they laugh.
>
> But laughter is critical. If we don't have laughter in the hallways, I go to check what the problem is. Laughter is major for me. I mean, this office is a hoot, isn't it?

Funny anecdotes have been shared with everyone. They have almost had a life of their own. Most of them have related to incidents with people, but none have been repeated maliciously. A few examples of the kind of stories that have made the rounds are:

> Did you hear about the lady who said she's so mad with her son, she said to him yesterday in Mike's office, "Your worst dream is going to come true. I'm going to come to all your classes. And I am going to wear white socks and shoes, and a grungy old dress, and a hairnet. I'll sit in every one of your classes to make sure you go."

Or

> At the staff meeting in February, one of the foreign-language teachers reminded staff that her students were interested in interviewing staff who had learned a second language. Shirley indicated that she was to be interviewed about her language experiences and asked for a show of hands for others who knew a second language and would be willing to be interviewed. A sprinkling of hands went up, and Shirley listed names for the language teacher to note. The computer teacher-expert raised his hand, and as Shirley said his name, another staff member said, "What's your second language, Harvey, DOS?" Great gales of laughter erupted, no one enjoying the joke more than Harvey.

After I had been in the hallways with Shirley for several days, she said:

> "Do you remember Eli?" And I did. He was a big, defensive tackle-size boy with a shock of black hair and a gentle smile. "Well, I call him Eli Razor." One day during first semester, Eli, Eli's mother, and Eli's father arrived at Shirley's office, all shouting at the top of their voices. Shirley could tell it had something to do with violence, safety, and Eli's well being.
>
> After calming this Mediterranean family, Eli related that he had left his teacher's classroom because someone had thrown a razor at him. Eli's father, an Orthodox minister, crossed himself repeatedly and his mother wailed, threatening to move Eli to another, safer school.
>
> Shirley immediately telephoned the classroom teacher and said she had the family in her office, and was the teacher aware of the razor incident? The teacher said, "Oh, yes. Shall I send a student to you with it?"
>
> Shirley asked if the teacher should not come herself. "No, a student can bring it," was the response.
>
> A few moments later a boy entered Shirley's office with a clenched fist. Shirley walked toward the boy, looking at the hand extended to her. "Is it in your hand?" He nodded and opened his hand, revealing a small bit of pink eraser.
>
> "Is that all of it?" asked Shirley.
>
> "I think part of it is in the garbage," replied the student.
>
> "That's it!" Eli shouted. "The 'raser!"
>
> His parents stared in shock at the tiny pink eraser. Voices raised again, but this time not in anger at the school, but upset with Eli. As his embarrassed parents fled the school, the minister promised Shirley he would pray for Eli's soul.
>
> Eli still looks a little sheepish as he greets Shirley each time they meet.

The staff enjoyed a joke, too. One morning while Shirley was touring the associate superintendent through the school, one of the teachers came out of class to tell the associate superintendent that Shirley was a "slave driver" and went into all sorts of explanations and contortions to show how hard she was on everyone. The teacher later admitted that he did not even know that it was the associate superintendent. The joke was on him!

One of the secretaries spoke of the warmth and the silly behavior in the office. Shirley has added to the fun by bringing little gifts for people. One of the secretaries has always had cold hands, and Shirley brought her a pair of gloves so that she could type with her gloves on. One of the assistant principals is a biathlete and was competing on Canada's team. Before he left for the competition, a knitted nose warmer was presented, with all due ceremony. Birthdays have been celebrated with cake, and the daycare children have come to the office to sing, hug, and bring joy on special days such as Hallowe'en and Valentine's Day.

Student assemblies have had participation by the Student's Union, and on Valentine's Day "Hug Coupons" were distributed. Shirley commented that as the weather warmed the school became a vibrant place. "I couldn't believe it. At the moment spring arrived, everybody was hugging everybody!"

The staff social committee has organized activities such as the horse races, line dancing, curling, and golf. Although the entire staff has not attended, they are fun for those who have. The entire staff have had two breakfasts and a luncheon together during the year and a Christmas social after school at a nearby community hall. Staff meetings have always got off to a good start with doughnuts. One staff member commented: "It's a fun place to work!"

The people and the relationships among the people have ensured that the Jasper Place team works together well. Shirley's skills as a listener and a questioner, the personalizing of the school, and the support systems have given the school community a sense of involvement in a fair, dignified, yet enjoyable environment.

Practices at Jasper Place High School

The philosophy and the people have meshed at Jasper Place, and practices have developed which enhance the school. Shirley has been a model for demonstrating her philosophy. Delegation of responsibility to others has expanded the concept of leadership. Everyone has been held accountable for the school's results, flexibility has been encouraged, and issues have been handled proactively. Shirley has been able to make the tough decisions and knows the benefits of celebrating successes.

Modelling

Shirley Stiles has put a series of practices into place at the school which have enabled the school to become more successful. One of the most pervasive practices that Shirley has implemented is modelling the philosophy and beliefs she values. She spoke often of "walking the talk" and is completely convinced that people will judge her more by what she does than by what she says.

In the first year that Shirley was at Jasper Place, and as often as she has been able, she teaches a class. This is not common practice for principals in senior high schools, and staff found it a refreshing change. One commented: "Shirley's teaching had a great impact on people's perception. Within our district, principals are, for a large part, viewed by teachers as managers. By teaching, she demonstrated she sees herself as a teacher first, a manager second." Another added:

> This was one of the major surprises, and I think it did her more good in the eyes of the regular teaching staff than she even might think it did. We teachers think that maybe the people that are never in the classroom sort of lose touch with what is happening in the classroom. But she decided right from the very first year that she would teach a class. And she took a class that was definitely not an easy class, and taught it. I think she has earned a lot of respect from the teachers. She did it right away, and nobody forced her to do it.

The police resource officer saw her modelling effective ways of relating to the students. He said that this has had an impact on his behavior:

> If somebody ever thought that an administrator had to be somebody who was totally distanced to students, they were wrong. I don't see her as being distanced from students at all. She's out there, she talks to them, and she respects them. She talks to those kids and gives them credit for who they are.
>
> I think that has really impressed me and made me look at the fact that as a policeman in this school, I, too, could go out and talk to kids and break down the barriers. When I was in high school, there was a barrier between the principal and the students.

Shirley has a wide knowledge of issues in education, particularly as they relate to high school. One of the teaching staff commented: "She's not a person that stands in one place or stops learning or stops trying new things." Another added:

> I think that she's constantly learning. The one thing I have tremendous respect for Shirley for is that you can sit down and talk with her and you know she is up to date on what is going on provincially, nationally, not just in education, but in a lot of other areas. Because of that, she's always a step ahead. She must read it, or she hears it; she gets involved in it somehow. And because of that our school is perceived as, when something is coming out, Jasper Place will already be there.

One of the students agreed:

> Oh, she knows. She is the most well-rounded person I've ever met. I'm lucky enough to have been to schools in the Northwest Territories, and other places in Alberta, not just Edmonton Public. So I've met a wide variety of people, and no one comes close to being the administrator that Mrs. Stiles is, that's for sure. She really knows a lot; she can help you with absolutely anything.

The assistant principals saw Shirley as a mentor. She has not only done her job, but she has also willingly provided support and encouragement to them. They could follow her example as well as engage in discussions with her. One expressed this view:

> I actually feel that I've been very fortunate in staying here as long as I have because I personally view Shirley as a good mentor. It's been really healthy for me to have been able to stay with her for four years. I've looked to her more for leadership in what direction she was dragging the school, not for details about how to do things. I've looked to her for the reasons that we did things.
>
> I know every month I learn something new still. I think it's often a two-way street. I enable Shirley in a lot of ways because I say, "Oh, that sounds neat. Why don't you try that and let me know how that happens?" And also I think in lots of ways I'm good for her because of the level of understanding between us.
>
> I think that I'm learning much faster from her now, because I'm privy to much more of the deep thinking that goes on, rather than just a surface comment.

A second assistant principal echoed the first: "If I could become as effective a leader as Shirley, that would be the ultimate. I model things after the way she handles herself."

This modelling has been a strategy used to assist the assistant principals to solve problems. As an example, one assistant recalled:

> I have a department that isn't doing well internally or feeling comfortable with each other. I lean to Shirley to ask how I could work with these people because there seems to be a problem. I can't lay my finger on it. How will I work with them? Very often she'll model an approach for me and then say, "See this worked really well. Why don't you try it with your department?" So together we can bounce things off, and I can compare myself to her in lots of ways. She gives me the opportunity to try it with my group of people.

One department head summed up his view:

> She is the model that I watch all the time, that I think every department head watches all the time, that I think every assistant principal watches all the time, and listens to very, very carefully. I do the same thing that Shirley does, except at my level.

The staff saw her modelling as motivating and in turn saw themselves as models for other staff or students. One department head commented on his role as model:

> If somebody has given me enough credit to put me in a leadership position, that person obviously thinks I have some skills, attitudes, and knowledge that should be passed on. I think it is my job to model the skills, attitudes, and knowledge so my colleagues pick up the good parts.

Another spoke of the importance of teachers being responsible role models for students.

The interesting question is how Shirley sees herself as a model. One of her teaching assignments was Mathematics 14, team-taught with one of the assistant principals. Why would she, a social studies teacher, choose math? She explained that "it fell off the timetable," and there was no teacher to whom it might be assigned. Mathematics 14 is a course for students experiencing difficulty in mathematics, likely those who have repeatedly failed mathematics; a challenging group to motivate.

When Shirley spoke of her teaching, she spoke of the approach that she and her partner took to the course, and the fun:

> It seemed to us Math 14 was a very basic course and there was no reason kids needed a whole semester to do it. So if in fact we could package it, why should we not let them experience the success of passing that course and immediately starting on the next one? Because these kids have never experienced any success in math.
>
> I would say half of the kids in our first class got ten credits in math. You couldn't stop them; it was remarkable. They could not believe it. They worked at their own pace; they worked on units. We did some demonstrations; we did some lectures. And when you were ready to challenge a unit, you did it.
>
> We had it first thing in the morning, and they used to run to class. Good fun. We ended up with more kids at the end of the year than we started with. Len used to say, "You got math? Do you want math? Do you need Math 14? Come with me." We gathered up people. And the staff said, "Look at these guys. Three months into the class and they're taking kids in." They asked, "Does it bother you?" "No," we'd answer.

> Nobody failed; they got incompletes. We said, "If you didn't quite make it, we're not going to fail you. Next year we're going to pick you up right where you are, and take you on."
>
> It's good for the staff to see that, the two of us running around with our lesson plans. It's an absolute hoot. The rest of the staff sat and looked and said, "They are nuts; this will never work." In fact, all Math 14/24 is now taught like that.

Her teaching, although very important to her, was structured to open the minds of some of the teachers. She saw that as one of her biggest challenges:

> Once it starts, you wonder why you had a problem. But in the beginning people have been trained to think that we've got to start there and finish there, and there is no other way to do it. What we've had to do is try and show them that there are other ways. When staff started to say, "What about the hours required for credits?" we said, "It's not the hours, it's the outcomes we're interested in." But it's been a long haul. We have a very open staff now.
>
> But I would say this has been one of the toughest things I have tried at J.P. You are asking teachers to give an extraordinary amount of energy and to rethink how they might do things and do that extra little bit. So what we have done is ask if there are some people who would be willing to take a group of kids, say from the 40s to 50s in science. Some people have been volunteering.
>
> Now what's happening this year is even better. Teachers came to me and said, "We want the list of all the kids who got between 40 and 50 in the first semester. We are going to send them a personal invitation to see if we can get them through." Guess what that means? Tutorials at noon, tutorials before school, tutorials after school. I think we're doing some pretty neat things here to try and get those kids through.

Preparing her staff for leadership is a role which Shirley has also taken seriously. She has focused on those individuals who have potential and has offered them opportunities to grow and develop their skills. Obviously, the assistant principals have been the group who get the majority of her attention. Professional development is one area that is vital. Shirley is a reader and is sure to provide materials for staff to ponder:

> I do it for everyone if it suits their particular area of expertise. For example, if I saw something on an open house or a description of how we might market our school, I would give it to Mike. I read an incredible amount, and I skim read. So I don't read every

> article. If I saw something on parents, a resource group, I'd give it to Len. Then I think it's their job to pick it up and go with it.
>
> On turnaround day I referred to five articles at the staff meeting that I had looked at on how we should market public schools. I think that's one of our problems: People think if it's big, it's bad. And I was impressed with how many staff came to me and wanted copies of the articles.
>
> I do believe that teachers are busy, and I do think, while they read in their own area, quite often they don't read what I call a broad school sense. A lot of what I write in *What's Happening* is to give them a summary of an article. Or say I read this book and you might be interested. You can borrow it from me. I am trying to get people to look at a bigger picture. The staff has really picked up on it, so now they rely on me.
>
> I think that's a responsibility we have, and we need to role-model the fact that we aren't stuck in one spot and that there are always things we can look at.

People have seen learning and changing modelled at Jasper Place.

Delegation and Negotiation

In a school the size of Jasper Place it would not be possible for one person to provide all the leadership effectively. Tasks have been delegated and individuals have been able to negotiate to receive those tasks that best suit their expertise. One of the department heads saw the connection between the concept of team and delegation: "I think once she has her team in place, she delegates really well. I think she trusts the individuals whom she works with." A second department head appreciated the personal nature of the delegation:

> During the course of the day, when anything or everything that crosses her desk that has my name on it, I think she's on the phone to me, or looking for me and saying, "This is what's here." Some days we may go three or four days where we have no "business" to talk about; other times I might see her three times in a day, about three different issues. Lots of contact with the principal. Far more here than I have ever had in any school.

The assignments delegated to the assistant principals have been determined through a process of negotiation. One assistant explained:

> Every year we have sort of a retreat for ourselves, and usually take one afternoon of our second p.d. day, and we sit down and review what has happened during the year, what we were comfortable with, what areas we thought we should maybe be doing some more work, and where we were experiencing trouble. We decide what things we'll concentrate on for the next year and what we will do. It only makes sense that the part you shine at, and the part you enjoy, should be a major hold in your job. We're able to do that.

However, Shirley saw it as more complex:

> They get to choose. I mean, it's negotiable. We sit there with the organizational chart and decide who'll pick up what, and they can negotiate because I think that's important. But we always look at something new and something that you're comfortable with and something you just want to try.
>
> It's important. If we don't do that with our assistant principals, we aren't going to force them to look at the whole school picture. I think it's really easy with all the things they do, to get focused so narrowly. If it's worked well once, why would you change it? That's what worries me, that people get stuck in ruts.

Shirley has delegated the evaluation of staff to the assistant principals and department heads. She does not spend a lot of time sitting in classrooms. With other people supervising the teachers, she has been confident that classroom performance has been monitored. She visits classrooms to learn about new curricula and monitors through the open doors as she walks about the school. Her time has been spent in other activities which would not have been possible if she had been in classrooms.

One of the spinoffs of Shirley's practice of delegating has been that others have learned to delegate as well. One of the assistant principals, a former junior high principal, commented on how he has learned to delegate:

> At a fairly late stage in my life I've started to learn the art of delegating. And that was always a problem. There were occasions, too many occasions, where I'd be doing things on a weekend simply because of my stupidity, trying to do all things and be all things for all people.
>
> I still find it quite surprising when I go out there and there is something that needs to be done, and I can pick up the phone and talk to somebody in the place and say, "This is what's got to be done, and this is how soon we've got to do it." And so we meet,

> and "Yeah, I can do that." It's just turned around so quickly and done so well. I guess it took a little while to learn something about myself, and learn there are very capable people who are just willing to get the job done.

With many of the activities that have gone on in the school, it has been important that the principal be seen to be supportive. Shirley explained how she has handled the many requests, from business partnerships to signing contracts with Coke or Pepsi:

> I'm in at the beginning. When we get groups together, I get things going, then I step out. I'll go to the meetings, but I like someone to take over. If it's just with me and I die or leave, it's going to fall apart. I think it's critical to have the principal involved right at the beginning and as active support so that people realize you support it.
>
> When I came in and the Misericordia Hospital partnership was already in place, I met with Gerry Hebert [president of the hospital] and went to all the meetings. Once he and I were comfortable, I stepped out. And that's been my role with most of the partnerships. I go to the initial meetings, make sure I know the people, and make myself available to talk to their boards, then I climb back.

It has been important for other people to pick up the responsibility for these activities. The concept of team has been reinforced. Many of Shirley's team have had an expertise that she does not have. When negotiating a contract for beverages, she knows that the teacher who has run the basketball tournament knows more about which scoreboards provided by which company have been preferable. Shirley added: "What do I know about scoreboards? I don't even want to know about them."

Shirley saw herself as busy in the beginning of any new activity. But she admitted: "One of the hardest things, I think, is actually letting go." But when she has let go, it has enabled her to move to another issue or activity, confident that someone on the team will take over. She felt that "we have to free ourselves up. Otherwise, you tie yourself up so tight you never have a minute to do the other stuff."

Accountability

Jasper Place High School, under Shirley's leadership, has been accountable for its results in areas of achievement, attitudes, finances, and the condition of the building. Many of the staff have been clear about how Shirley has viewed that accountability. A department head explained:

> A lot of people would blame the circumstances that they find themselves in, but Shirley doesn't do that. She looks at what the circumstances are, she makes the best choices she can, given the environment, and then she moves forward. I think that optimism makes a difference.
>
> We don't make excuses. I think you must realize we don't have the best student population in the world, but we don't make excuses for that. We just do the best job we can. I prefer that kind of approach.

Assistant principals and department heads have been held accountable for their results. They have been given independence, but expectations have been set that they are required to meet. One department head explained the accountability:

> We are also the managers that are directly responsible for results. When the diploma results come out, it is our level of leadership that is really ultimately accountable. And whatever I do as a curriculum leader is geared towards making sure that the quality of instruction that is provided for each of the students is such that they maximize their performance and they are most effective in learning in the courses that they take.

Shirley has also modelled accountability for her actions by always indicating to staff when she would not be in the school and where she was going. She has consistently informed staff of what has occurred and what she has learned when she has returned to school, and she has shared any materials that she has collected. Although the staff know that she must be out of the school on occasion, she does not want them to feel resentful that she has been away. Because of the reputation that she has, she is more likely to be invited to participate in out-of-school activities than other high school administrators.

Shirley has also been accountable for a multimillion-dollar budget. The budget has always been a challenge for Shirley at Jasper Place. Discovering a $750,000 deficit when she arrived was a shock. Clearing it in two years required great skill. The staff have appreciated the challenges that she has faced and have commended her for clearing that deficit, as well as surviving the current provincial cuts to education. One staff member said: "I think we've seen progress and change and growth in a time of financial constraints, and I think that's pretty good."

In retrospect, Shirley has seen the deficit in a positive light, because it has enabled the staff to come together to solve a common problem:

> The best thing that happened was the deficit, because in order to solve that problem, the school had to pull together as a unit. In fact, it was a blessing in disguise, although it seemed an insurmountable problem when we started.
>
> We got permission to take three years to clear the deficit. We did it in two. But the reason we did it in two was because the staff moved as a unit. We put all the money in one pot and decided how to proceed.

Shirley demonstrated the same accountability with respect to the budget this fall when money was not available. She declared staff eligible for transfer after the first semester to save money, a move which had never been made in the district.

Financial accountability in the high schools is becoming a major challenge. Alberta Education has determined that high schools will receive their funding based on the courses that students have completed at that school. What that means is that schools will be required to keep students in class, completing their courses, in order to receive money. Traditionally, high schools have been funded on the basis of the number of credits in which students were registered at the beginning of the year.

Shirley supported the government's change:

> The good thing the government has done is that they are only paying you on the kids you keep. And that's one of the best things Klein has done. I don't agree with some other things, but that part is good, because what it means is, we have to be far more creative about keeping kids in school.

However, there are problems with the equity of this funding. As Shirley explained:

> I do think that there has to be some recognition of the fact that you are actually working with kids, and there has to be some funding for the kids you take in. I don't think that you can assume that because they don't get to the end, they're worth nothing. Maybe there's a sliding scale or something.
>
> In Grades One to Nine a kid is a kid, whether they stay one month or the year, but in high school it depends on completing a course. The amount of career counselling, the amount of working with probation officers and police officers, with administrators to encourage attendance for at-risk kids, and you lose all the money if they don't complete. What's going to happen is, we're going to say we don't want those kids to begin with and put them out in the community. That really bothers me.

Shirley has always believed that keeping students in school is important for their learning. Now it is critical to have students finish courses to enable the school to continue to offer its wide range of programs.

Flexibility and Openness

There has been an atmosphere at Jasper Place that has encouraged people to change, to experiment, to do things in new ways, and to do new things. One of the assistant principals commented that in order for change to be brought about in a school, the leader must be able to determine how quickly that change can reasonably occur. Another assistant saw the change that has happened under Shirley's direction as being incremental:

> This is what I find happens all the time with Shirley. You take something and you just get a little better with it every time, and then a new little thing occurs to you. It doesn't all happen at once. It happens in little pieces, where a little piece happens here, and then because of our philosophy and the way we think about things, another piece occurs.

> And so I've learned that a lot of successes are because that seed is there for Shirley. She gives us that underlying belief.

As staff have seen Shirley demonstrate her own flexibility and willingness to change, they have become more confident. The custodian noted:

> She knows how to shift gears real fast. She could be in talking to a parent regarding a child's concerns, and then I'll walk in right after that and talk to her about something to do with my area, and she'll just switch gears. I think she's really flexible, she really can do that.

Her openness to suggestion and willingness to listen have been appreciated by the head secretary as well. Support staff know that if, for example, someone must be declared surplus to the needs of the school, Shirley will listen and be open to discussion and will make sure that the individual concerned is made aware of her decision as soon as possible.

One of the students said that she would tell anyone that "Mrs. Stiles is a pretty open person. If you ever have problems, you can go to her and tell them to her."

This openness and flexibility has led to some different approaches to programming to meet student needs. Even before students have registered at Jasper Place, they have been invited to tour the school, ask questions, and participate in hands-on activities in the Career and Technology labs.

Alberta Education, knowing that the school has been interested in flexible programming, has invited Jasper Place to consider piloting a distance-learning Career and Life Management (CALM) course which may be done by students outside the regular school program. Shirley has been enthusiastic about the possibilities that this delivery model will have for those students who have difficulty scheduling CALM into their program.

With the mandated use of the Carnegie Unit being eliminated, the school has become more flexible in granting credits. Once students have shown that they have completed the course, credits are given. Challenges of courses by students who believe that they can demonstrate the knowledge and skill required to receive credit have been possible at Jasper Place. Shirley indicated that the number of students who have challenged courses could be counted on one hand, but the opportunity has existed for them to do so. She has attended meetings at Alberta Education about the policy for challenge exams and recognizes that the Alberta Teachers' Association is not supportive because they fear teachers will be out of jobs. However, she thought that giving credits for courses for which students have already demonstrated the requisite skills is preferable to having students sitting in the wrong courses.

While I was at the school, a call came from a west-end junior high school principal asking if a student could be transferred to Jasper Place for the second semester. Shirley was receptive to the idea and asked the principal to invite the parent and student to see the school counsellors to register. She followed up with the counselling department so that they would have the background before the call came from the parent. Once Shirley had spoken to the principal and it was apparent that the move to high school was in the student's best interests, Shirley immediately put things into action to ensure that the move was handled in a timely fashion.

Another option for student programming that has been used sparingly at Jasper Place is correspondence or distance-learning courses. Shirley pointed out that

> it can be an industry. We really discourage it, although it's useful to have it there as an alternative for a student. It's expensive because you have to pay for it, so we use it very sparingly.

> There are some kids who definitely have health problems. One student had a sleeping disorder, and she graduated because we did a mixture of school-attended courses and correspondence. But in the main, it is the most unsuccessful thing I have ever seen.

Two students visited Shirley at the start of the second semester requesting correspondence. One young man was a convicted rapist who had raped one of the students currently at the school. Although he had never originally attended Jasper Place, this young man had been administratively transferred by the associate superintendent from another district high school to Jasper Place, as a result of problems at that school. At the time of the transfer, everyone was unaware that this rape had occurred. When the young girl saw her attacker, she fled the school in panic. Her parents returned to the school, demanding that he be removed or they would move their daughter. A number of other students also indicated that they would move if he stayed. Because Shirley was obliged to provide programming for this young man, she chose to pay for correspondence for this student, one course at a time. He has not been allowed to be in the school except to register for the courses. He has successfully completed several courses and has almost met his graduation requirements. Yet the other students feel safe, knowing that he will not be in the school.

The second young man was on probation and was disrupting classes and behaving aggressively toward other students in the school. Shirley and the probation officer decided that he should not be exempt from schooling but that he should receive his program at home. He, too, was registered in one correspondence course and was told that he could not be in the school. His fate will be determined by how well he does on his first correspondence course.

Another change that has continued to demonstrate the flexibility of the school is the reporting of student volunteer hours on the report cards. As Shirley reviewed applications for scholarships and letters of reference she had written for students, it became clear that the students who received the scholarships were the ones who led the most well-rounded lives or who were prepared to give something to their communities. The staff decided that it was part of their job of educating young people to let them know that you cannot just take from society, but that you also have to give back.

This year the question became how to capture the information about their contributions to the community from students. The school developed a very simple form, distributed it in advisor class, and asked students to report how many hours they had spent in extracurricular activities and how many hours they had given to volunteering in the community. The form was voluntary, but approximately 1,800 students returned it. The information was processed.

Shirley reported to the parents' resource group that 40,000 hours of volunteer work had been done in the school in the first three months of the semester. Parents requested that this information be included on the students' report cards. Everyone, including the central office staff, said that this was not possible. The chairman of the parent resource group insisted: "There's nothing that says there's no way. Go back and figure it out." The school persisted. Finally, an idea occurred to one of the assistant principals. Labels could be printed and permanently put on the report cards.

One of the parents came into the school saying that she hated housework and was willing to type anything if it would not take a job away from one of the secretaries. She now volunteers three mornings a week in the office. Before report cards were issued, she had the task of typing all the labels and attaching them.

The enthusiasm for this additional information on the report cards from the parents and the students has been tremendous. As Shirley pointed out: "There is a living document that says this person did this for their community."

The staff have benefitted from the flexibility at Jasper Place as well. Teacher exchanges have been encouraged. The librarian left after Christmas for a year in Australia and an Australian teacher has replaced her. This was possible because of Shirley's support.

Part-time assignments have also been encouraged. Shirley explained:

> For people who are very tired after a whole day, or the thought of a full day, they start a bit later, or end a bit earlier. It's just the break they need. They might teach 6/7 instead of 7/7. It puts them into another tax bracket, so there is very little salary difference.
>
> We have one lady who is always ill during the onset of winter, so I've persuaded her to teach just the second semester every year. It's the first time she's been healthy.
>
> Another teacher I declared surplus this year. She wasn't placed in another school and is pregnant. She's going off to have her baby at Spring Break, so she is our study-hall person for two months. She's done an amazing amount of work. She also wants to spell off the teacher who's doing grad so that lady can get organized for grad photographs. So it works really well.
>
> Staff like that flexibility. Some people don't like part-timers. I quite like them. They give you a lot more than part-time.

Job-sharing has also been possible at Jasper Place. Shirley told of two math teachers who were both having babies. When they were about to return to school, they came to her and presented themselves as one unit. They said that they were going to teach one set of classes throughout the year. Shirley said:

> I never gave it another thought. That's how we scheduled them, as one person, and they figured it all out. If one baby was sick, the other taught two classes. I don't know how they worked it, but it was wonderful.

Other versions of job-sharing have also happened within the school. If there have been two small classes of the same course, they have been collapsed into one, and the teachers have become a team to teach them. Between the two of them, the teachers determine the schedule.

Professional development has been handled flexibly as well. Teachers have been able to make deals and save their funds for two years in order to attend a more expensive conference. If a staff member has been interested in seeing an elementary, a junior high, or another senior high school classroom, a substitute teacher has been provided for that teacher to go on an intervisitation. When a new course of study has been developed, an entire department could be out of the school on a particular day attending a workshop.

The flexibility provided to the staff has also been expected to be provided by the staff. The staff who are rigid and unwilling to change have been encouraged to transfer to another school. As one teacher commented: "There's no chance to stagnate, which is good. I thrive on change; some people don't. And that's probably where she gets her opposition. I don't know if she does." The staff who have been hired at Jasper Place have been hired based on their openness, flexibility, willingness to learn, and willingness to share. Each time staff have been added, Shirley has seen it as an opportunity for the school to strengthen its team.

Many of the staff have enjoyed the opportunity to do innovative things. The physical education department has experimented with modular physical education, allowing students to select the modules they would like. The department head said that "it allows you to use the specialties or a particular program. It allows the kids to have some choice in their programs so the attendance, the mark, and the attitude go up."

A science teacher has focused on risk taking and the support provided by the administration. He knows that he is not going to have a problem if he tries something that does not work.

One of the assistant principals has also valued the opportunity to do new things:

> One of the things I really appreciate about Shirley is she's a risk taker, and she loves us to be risk takers, too. We've instigated many, many different programs in this school, and it's exciting because you can come up with an idea, and you can go to Shirley and she'll support you, if it's an idea worth supporting.
>
> I know in my role, working with the community, if I come up with an idea, she allows us to run with it, and she supports what we do. It's exciting coming to school because we have so many initiatives in place and so many neat things we're doing in conjunction with the community.

To encourage parents to feel welcome at the school, the administration has been flexible as well. Shirley described the strategy:

> When I first came to this school, parents were reluctant to come into the school. They did not always perceive themselves to be welcome or to be able, so what we had to do was make them feel okay about coming. Part of the work we did was to take our day and pull it. We would say to parents, "We'd like to see you; we're here from 7:00." A lot of parents come in on their way to work. They really appreciate that. What they like is that we want them in.

Shirley thrives on ideas. She is frequently engaged in conversations about good ideas. She said that she has to be selective:

> You can't just go with every idea. And I've got millions popping into my head all the time, so somebody has to put the curbs up. But all of the good ideas we have tried have cost us absolutely nothing.
>
> And the other thing is, I like people to take risks. I think we've done some zingy things that people think are okay. If you don't take risks, you won't move forward. If you're in the right atmosphere, then you get really good ideas.
>
> I get really nervous when people say the budget won't let us do such and such. Not at all. The budget provides you the means to give teachers their supplies; it does not provide you a way to put ideas into action. And I think we've just made it a scapegoat.

When Shirley evaluates how things are going, one of the questions she asks is, Are we fluid enough? Are we being versatile enough, flexible enough? There are some areas that have continued to be a challenge. One of those is the area of student attendance and retention. New ideas are being sought to improve the attendance rate, but the school has moved dramatically in terms of retaining students in courses.

Another area of concern for Shirley has been how to get students back into school. The district has a strong policy leading to expulsion but little to help reintegrate these students. In Shirley's view:

> I think if we expel, expel, expel, we're expelling into the neighborhood, and we're saying, "Please go out and rob and plunder and steal and all those kinds of wonderful things." What we have got to do is get the kind of system they have in place in Vancouver, where there is an alternate school that you go to, and you work your way back in. Not to the same school, but back into a regular school.

Implementing the new Career and Technology Studies (CTS) courses is an area that has provided scope for a wealth of flexibility. One-credit modules will be available, and students can custom design their own programs. Shirley would love to have the school become a showcase for CTS and have every student involved in the modules. Community involvement in the school requires flexibility and creativity, and there is still work to be done in that area. Shirley hoped that CTS and community involvement may work together to the benefit of everyone.

Being Proactive

Shirley has been seen by those around her as one who is able to plan strategies to deal with situations before major problems arise. One assistant principal believed that because she is so well-read, she is aware of issues throughout North America and is able to see how others have dealt with similar issues. He said: "She'll pick out those appropriate parts and run with them." One of the department heads expanded:

> A principal has to keep a finger on the pulse of every strand of society. I think that very few principals are able to do that to the extent that Shirley does. Shirley takes what she finds and relates it to the school. She says, "This is what is coming down," before the people themselves even know that it's coming down. She's alert and forward thinking all the time, looking at how this idea may relate to education.

A parent expressed similar sentiments: "Shirley is really proactive. She keeps up with what trends are coming down the pipes in education, and takes a very proactive stance. We're going to put steps in place prior to anything negative happening." Another parent echoed: "I just don't think that problems get out of hand. I think that they are dealt with as they come up."

Shirley has developed a complete portfolio for the school. If there has been a problem, everything that has been critical to the operation of the school is filed and listed in two binders. The location of all important documents is noted in the binders, and a new person could feel confident of being well informed in a short space of time. She has provided complex monthly reports to her associate superintendent as well. These reports outline all significant results at Jasper Place for the month. They are not a requirement, but Shirley has been convinced that it is preferable for her supervisor to have too much information rather than too little.

Shirley's proactive stance has focused on student issues. The school acknowledges, for example, that racial incidents are possible at Jasper Place. Shirley has been strong in her belief about bringing issues forward before a crisis occurs:

> I think one of the things we haven't done in our schools is take stock of the fact that we have a very mixed society. We cannot presume that every incident does or does not have racial

> overtones. But we had better stand up and say, "We think this had racial overtones," if we think it did. We need to look at each particular incident that occurs and say, "Okay, what was the basic problem here; was it a racial one? If it was or if it wasn't, what are we going to do?" To presume that they all are or they all aren't is making a huge mistake.
>
> What we try to do is to be very discreet, and the thing I'm learning is that we've got to garner the support of the community. It is not the school's responsibility to solve these. Yes, we have a part to play, but I think communities have a huge part to play. And their part is to work with the parents, to work with the kids outside of the school setting, and then to work with us so that we get some interpretation of where they are coming from.
>
> We had a perceived problem with our male Arab students. What happened was that they seemed to group together, and they wore a kind of uniform. The uniform is very nice, black leather jackets, black pants, and black boots or shoes with steel tips. And when you walked by them, they were speaking in their own language. Staff felt uncomfortable walking by them, girls felt uncomfortable walking by them, and other guys felt kind of threatened because they didn't group like that themselves. We did have a problem where they acted as a group, and we had to have five students expelled.
>
> One of the things we decided to do was to find out why they grouped. So, we got in someone from the Arab-Canadian Friendship Association and said we needed help. We said someone needed to come and talk to us about these kids. It was kind of interesting. It is a cultural thing. In elementary, they expect them all to play together. In junior high, boys and girls are starting to separate; and by high school, the guys group together for safety, because they are getting towards the marriageable stage where they are going to be linked with someone. Safety is being with your own group. It's actually the parents who encourage the grouping.
>
> We thought it made sense that they spoke their own language until we discovered that in fact many of these young people don't speak a common language. And many of the things they were saying were quite obscene. We have had to work with these kids. They've been very good; they still stand together, which is fine. They don't cluster in a group, and they are definitely speaking English when you go by. We had an added problem after the group expulsion in determining how to handle their brothers, cousins, and friends who were still in the school.

Shirley has also learned that for any issue to be solved involving this cultural group, it is vital that the father be involved. Meeting with a female principal has caused some discomfort for the men, but Shirley has solved it by inviting the individual to bring another man with him when they discuss the problem.

One of the benefits of being open to cultural differences was the discovery of a tremendous amount of support from the various ethnic communities. Shirley now has contacted a large number of organizations who are interested in working with the school in multiculturalism. This measure will put a positive focus on differences.

The school has begun the practice of celebrating multicultural diversity. Shirley visited Vancouver and was impressed with how the high schools there had chosen to acknowledge the wide range of cultures.

> Multicultural diversity. A lot has been made of that in the media. And you can go two ways: You can say, "Whoops, we got a problem. We've got fifty-nine ethnic groups that don't like each other"; or you can say, "Well, this is Canada today. How are we going to handle it? Let's celebrate it."
>
> One of the things we try to do is recognize it. Right now, for example, in advisor class we say, "You are invited to submit special cultural or ethnic dates as celebration to the student advisor committee. Let's celebrate our cultural and ethnic diversity." This is an open invitation to students, and it's kind of interesting what they tell us.

The school has a multifaith calendar which lists the special days for each culture. Separate months have been devoted to particular cultures to share their celebrations. Shirley has seen some really positive results from this. The goal is to have the students assume the responsibility for the cultural celebrations.

One of the most touching stories of another culture was shared by Shirley:

> A few years ago we got seventeen kids from Afghanistan. They had never been in school; never even set foot in a school. And they were beautiful, wonderful kids. The second week they were here, a whole parent delegation arrived. Filled the whole office. I thought, "What have we done wrong?" The moms wore veils and long dresses, and they had just come to find out when it was their turn to clean the school.

The parents were surprised that this was not expected in Canadian schools. It is not only in times of difficulty that one needs to be sensitive to cultural differences.

To ensure the safety of everyone, strangers in the school are unwelcome unless they have checked in at the office. The administrators, because each of them has been in the hallways so regularly, recognize those who belong in the school. At a class change with hundreds of students in the hallway, Shirley called to two individuals to come to speak with her. She determined that they were students from another high school and sent them on their way without incident. When I asked how she could be sure that they did not belong, she replied that they "acted funny." She said that you soon get a sense of how comfortable individuals are in the building, and strangers are easy to spot. This would not be possible if the rest of the student body were not known to her. All the administration team have recognized and treated strangers consistently to avoid unpleasant incidents. Teachers who have seen strangers have merely called the office, and someone has arrived to assist.

Another example of the school being proactive is in the area of dating violence. The Misericordia Hospital did a needs survey of young people to determine their major concerns. In the write-in space on the survey, young people indicated that dating violence was a major concern. Students also shared in advisor class when surveyed that there was a real concern about dating violence. On Shirley's Vancouver trip she was made aware of the magnitude of the problem and saw, in Golden, B.C., billboards advertising presentations on dating violence. One of the assistant principals gathered some videos, and, once Shirley saw them, she noted how many things she had seen in the school that could have been the beginning of this violence.

When students were asked if they would like information about dating violence, there was not one student who was opposed. However, Shirley wanted to focus on the safety aspect, rather than the violence. She felt that

> in today's society, safety is a major issue for all of us. And I think you and I could benefit from someone saying, "Are you careful when you climb in a car, are you careful when . . . ?" I think this is just another part of being careful. They need to know some of the signs, how do you handle them. That's what some of the tapes are saying. Girls can recognize if their boyfriends are too jealous, too possessive.

This was the beginning of a "Healthy Relationships" program. A partnership established in the west end by the school and various agencies, called West End Community Unity, was approached by the school to assist. Between the social services, the university, the hospital, and the police, a program has been developed and has been presented to every Grade 11 class in the school. Shirley was pleased:

> Normally in a school that would have taken much longer to get up and running, but because of the involvement of others, somebody knows of a video, somebody knows that the Sexual Assault Centre has someone who comes and trains people. They trained our kids, and the program was led by students. It is really a direct result of that partnership.

Toughness

Although dignity and respect have been offered to everyone within the Jasper Place school community, Shirley and her team have not been soft. She has followed her beliefs consistently and will not bow to pressure from others who have differing viewpoints. A large urban high school has a complex culture, and many conflicts and issues arise on a daily basis. When I asked one of the assistant principals about Shirley being perceived as soft, she said:

> I think there is still a feeling that males do it better, and females are soft. However, having known Shirley as I do, she is every bit as tough as anyone in following her ideals and her belief system. And that enables us to do what we do in this school.

A second assistant principal facetiously said: "I've often thought that she has more balls than most administrators I've ever worked with!"

Student behavior is one of the areas that has often required a tough stance. Jasper Place has had a behavior code that has been followed consistently. In the instance of the group expulsion of five students this year, Shirley went forward with the expulsions even though she had received personal threats. Undercover police provided protection at the school. Her demonstration of strength and her ability to continue to pursue the expulsions strengthened feelings of cohesion within the staff and built greater respect for Shirley's courage.

Shirley faces a dilemma when there are student-behavior problems such as this incident. It is the dilemma of timing how quickly to proceed. It is a difficult balance to be sure to get all the information, but not to be perceived as ignoring the situation.

The stand the school has taken on attendance has also required some toughness. Shirley felt strongly that parents must accept responsibility for their child's attendance at school. Some parents believe that if the school is notified of an absence before it occurs, the student's absence should be excused and not recorded on the report card. Shirley can recount countless stories of parents wanting changes made on the permanent record. As she pointed out: "If you are away, you are away." Last year Shirley had a mother come into the school absolutely enraged. Her son was a wonderful diver for Canada. She said that on his report card it said he was away for 21 days. Shirley asked her if he was away those days or not. She said that he was away, but he was diving for Canada. Shirley replied: "That's great! We celebrated the fact that he was diving for Canada, he's still on the honors list, but he was away twenty-one days." The parent wanted no absences to be shown, and Shirley refused. But she has continued to face these challenges from parents. She added that she would prefer that the school retain the students and get them through courses, rather than try to prove that they had perfect attendance.

The teachers phone the home after students have missed three classes. Each teacher has that responsibility. Students can pick up their own attendance profile each week, or the profile can be faxed to parents. At one time calls were made about each absence, an expensive task. Two support-staff positions have been eliminated now that the school does not call about every absence. And the ironic thing about the change is that the attendance at the school has improved 5% this year.

To act consistently requires a degree of toughness. One of the students attending Jasper Place on a student visa from Hong Kong came to Shirley, appealing the assistant principal's decision not to allow him to register in English 30 for the second time, in the second semester. If the student has made an honest effort the first time through and needs a second opportunity, the course is open to him if space is available. In this case, this student had missed many classes and not turned in assignments. Shirley refused to allow him to register again even though this would mean that he would have to attend summer school in order to graduate. When the young man offered to pay, she indicated to him that money was not the issue, effort was.

The strength of Shirley's stand and the changes that have been possible as a result of not backing down are reflected in her amusing yet serious account:

> Last year three Asian students came to me for references. I don't write a reference unless I've interviewed the student. These students had incredible marks. I said, "I can't write you a reference because you haven't done a thing for the school. You have done nothing. You haven't played on the badminton team, you haven't tried to be involved as an Ambassador, you haven't been involved." Amazing how our whole Asian population is volunteering this year.

Staff issues have been dealt with as toughly as student issues. Teachers expect that if Shirley has a problem, she would talk with them. Several of the staff commented that it was refreshing to feel that there were no hidden agendas. She would generally encourage an individual to try something new and would coach rather than direct. But some of the situations have not always been easy for Shirley. A few years ago one of the staff received an appointment as assistant principal. Even before the year began, both Shirley and the newly appointed assistant knew that this was not a job to which the person was committed. Shirley persuaded the individual to resign the designation. Shirley still knows that it was the right thing to do because she has seen the individual mature over the past couple of years. That person was not ready for the responsibility when given the position.

A second staff issue that required Shirley's toughness was the cafeteria. The reputation of the staff dining room had been nothing short of gourmet for several years. However, Shirley discovered when she arrived that the cafeteria was losing approximately $110,000 a year. She recounted the story:

> The cafeteria I believe was a tremendous money drain. In the first year I discovered in fact that we lost about $110,000 each year. That is a million dollars in less than ten years. But it was nice food, wonderful food.
>
> So starting in the second year, I developed a plan. At the end of the third year, I actually got rid of the cafeteria. But it took a year to plan and decide how we were going to do it. The decision was to privatize it. But we went through the process saying, "This is the situation. Can you improve it? Can you bring it down to no cost to the school?" And it was impossible to do that, or they felt it was. But we did go through a very long process, and it was very tough. The staff had tremendous loyalty to the cafeteria and the people that worked there. They were very good workers in this school.

In the end the privatized cafeteria has provided good service at no cost to the school's budget. The company providing the service has also received the contract for vending machines in the building and providing beverages to all sports events. It seems hard for many to remember the heartache that that decision caused.

This toughness has extended to maintaining her ideals at all costs. Shirley told this story:

> I did have some staff who told me they did not like the philosophy that I had. I'll never forget the lady who told me. When I said, "Well, maybe you should change, since I am the principal." She said, "No, I will outstay you." That was probably a pretty good thing to say, because they had six principals in eight years. So she probably figured that if she stayed two years, I'd be gone. Anyway, she left.

This year one of the office staff began to take much time away from work. This person had been at the school "forever," each year seemingly less able to keep up with the demands of the job. Although this staff member was within a few months of retirement, he seemed unwilling or unable to retire. Physical and psychological illness plagued him. To balance the needs of the individual and the school, Shirley had to face some tough decisions. The first step was to ensure that the staff member saw a doctor and was given a certificate indicating that the person was unfit to work.

The person obtained that certificate but then began to say that his return to work was imminent. Shirley determined that unless a doctor, hired by the school board, said that the person was ready to return, the individual could not return. However, because she really cared about the individual, that person actually came to visit, spoke of the diagnosis and prognosis, and was friendly and thankful to Shirley for standing firm.

Shirley has expected the other administrators to be as tough as she has been. At a one-on-one with one of the assistant principals, they discussed the inappropriate behavior of one of the department heads supervised by this assistant. When the assistant indicated that the department head would be spoken to, Shirley insisted that a letter be sent from the assistant principal, documenting the incident, because it was the second time that such behavior had occurred. Although it was clear that the assistant principal did not have an option, the matter was handled with humor and sensitivity by Shirley. She related a time when she had had to do the same thing and how hard she had found the task.

To be an effective administrator at Jasper Place, Shirley has had to demonstrate her strength on a daily basis.

Acknowledging and Celebrating

Jasper Place School has taken great pleasure in celebrating. Each staff member's birthday is acknowledged by Shirley. One of the assistant principals had a birthday in February, and everyone in the main office, including students waiting to see someone, joined in a chorus of "Happy Birthday" to him. A cake had been made by one of the secretaries and everyone enjoyed a piece of cake and some good-natured conversation.

The staff have also received cards on Hallowe'en, Christmas, and Valentine's Day from Shirley. One teacher said that it was a little thing, but really important. She also said that she tried to extend the same thoughtfulness to others as a result of Shirley's modelling.

Student assemblies were held on Valentine's Day. She indicated that "you don't have to be in elementary school to celebrate Valentine's Day." As we walked to the gymnasium to begin the first assembly, one of the teachers was handing out chocolate hearts to everyone he passed and wishing students and staff "Happy Valentine's Day" with great enthusiasm.

Shirley began each of the assemblies by reminding students to wish their parents "Happy Valentine's Day." The Students' Union was celebrating "Random Acts of Kindness Week" at these assemblies and distributing roses to some students, passes to West Edmonton Mall Waterpark to some students, and "hug coupons" to others. Shirley reinforced the "Random Acts" by suggesting that students do something kind to someone else, to themselves, and to the environment. She also let them know that "teachers like hugs, too."

For Teacher Appreciation Week, the administration ordered a carnation for each teacher, and the four administrators visited every staff member, giving each a flower. Shirley had no doubt that the $85.00 expense was well worth it.

To celebrate student art work and to personalize the school, art is displayed throughout the school. There is an art gallery, and the main office is used as an art studio. Artwork is changed every two weeks. Students come in to show friends their art, and parents enjoy the art as they visit the office. The public acknowledgement of student work has raised the status of art in the school as well as given the school a more pleasing environment.

Jasper Place School was also invited to set up an art display in City Hall this spring to celebrate the 200th anniversary of the city.

Basketball is celebrated with the annual REB Tournament, first held in 1982. This tournament involves the entire school and is a major event. Twenty-four teams compete, eight from the United States. Local businesses have sponsored the event by contributing $45,000 annually. More than 2,000 people have attended the games, which begin with opening ceremonies; as Shirley put it, "the whole tutti-frutti." Billboards and media coverage publicize the event, and it is a fine celebration just before the Christmas break. All this has happened with no classes cancelled. The only way that students have been able to earn their way into the opening ceremonies is by having perfect attendance. Shirley has encouraged and supported this tournament and has been a proud speaker at the opening ceremonies.

Student achievement is also celebrated at Jasper Place. One of the traditions that Shirley has established is Honors Lunches for students who have achieved an 80% average on three of their four courses. This is one time that the intercom has been used. All honors students are called down to the staff cafeteria before the end of the morning to shake hands with the four administrators and join them for lunch. Each grade has a separate lunch each reporting period. Again, the cost has not been a deterrent.

Awards Night is another special evening at Jasper Place. Shirley described the event:

> This year we recognized 250 to 300 students. It's an evening that starts at 7:00 and ends at 9:00. Our aim is to recognize as many kids as we can during that time, and to have the people stay there for every one.
>
> We used to start with Grade Ten, then Eleven, then Twelve, and end up with the biggies. Now we start with all the big awards, so that everybody can see what the winners get and

> what they can aspire to. We end with the Grade Tens so the people will stay.
>
> And we've had tremendous support. We have a big crowd. It's done by a school committee run by one of the teachers, and everyone is involved.
>
> It's in the fall, when they've actually earned their Rutherford Scholarships. We asked the students if they wanted to move it to the spring and they said, "No." The week before is the district awards. Even if we have students winning awards, few go. The reason is, they are going to university and writing exams. The next week we have ours, and every Grade Twelve who's in the city comes back. So you figure that one out.

Graduation is a major celebration at all high schools. The Jasper Place ceremony is held at the Jubilee Auditorium. Before the ceremony, Shirley writes to each graduand, asking what each plans to do in the future, what interests each one has, and any other information the person would like to share. A form is provided to return to Shirley. Although it is not possible to introduce each separately, Shirley has developed her talk for the ceremony using the themes in the information provided. She commented that some special returns she has received have said things such as, "Tell my mother and father that I love them." Other themes are that girls seem to be prepared to go into every career and that students are far more positive than some people portray them. She also indicated that at graduation in 1994, she knew every one of the graduating students, almost 300 Grade 12s.

Emotions run high at graduation. The end of the ceremony has included a slide show, complete with music. The aim of the show has been to ensure that every graduate is on at least one slide. Shirley said: "No one leaves. There is just a hush. People laugh, sob; it's wonderful."

The graduation dinner and dance have also been traditional. This year the parents have been organizing that event, not the school. Shirley pointed out that

> we made a determination last year that we had to talk about the things we have to do; that was our mandate. The parents agreed that the dinner and dance was their mandate. So the grad committee is divided into committees and one committee works with the parents. And the parents are pleased to be involved.

It seems that every aspect of school life has been valued and celebrated.

The practices at Jasper Place, including modelling, delegating, accountability, flexibility, proactivity, toughness, and celebrating, are consistent with Shirley's beliefs and the beliefs of the other participants in the school community.

Programs

Several programs have been put into place at Jasper Place to enhance the opportunities for students to be successful. These programs include the advisor program, the ambassadors, a program for student teachers, principal exchanges, parent involvement programs, and community involvement programs. Some of these programs have been established for the students, some for the parents, and some for the community. Other programs involve the staff. However, any program which is added at the school must be consistent with the school's philosophy and beliefs.

Advisor Program

Large high schools can be depersonalized. In many cases, students see a variety of teachers, one for each course. No one has responsibility for the general well-being of the individual students. Information is shared over a public address system by a disembodied voice, and students are not expected to be involved in decisions that may affect them.

In an attempt to personalize Jasper Place, an advisor program, which Shirley initiated, was established. However, before it was implemented, a long process preceded it. Shirley explained:

> In order to get it into place, I knew I had to have unanimous support. If one person doesn't work, it doesn't work. But I had to make them some promises, because you can't keep saying to staff that we want you to do more and more. We said that there would be no extra work. We would provide all the materials, run off the copies for them, and we would provide inservice every month at the staff meeting as to what we wanted them to do.

Unanimous support was given and the monthly packages are prepared and distributed. A committee of volunteers meets to review the materials, which are prepared by the department head of the counseling area. He provides an inservice for staff at their monthly meetings.

The advisor program has involved all teachers and all students in period two on the timetable. Five minutes has been added to the second period to allow teachers to spend extra time with the students. However, the teacher may select to use 5 minutes a day or 25 minutes once a week, or any combination of time that makes sense. The requirements are that all students are given the daily communications, printed in the *J.P. News,* and that the information package is shared with students at some time during each month. Student input is gathered during advisor period as well, so that surveys from central office, requests for students' suggestions, and other input will all be gathered during the second period. In advisor period students have also been asked to share any concerns which should be forwarded to Mrs. Stiles.

About once a month Shirley has also asked for input from the students. She has found that it is an effective mechanism for determining how students feel. She has reported to them the results of their input at the grade assemblies. Information can be collected from almost 2,000 students in one period; gathering the input is not onerous for anyone.

Because it is a regular second period, almost all of the students would have a different advisor each semester. Shirley believes that everyone is a professional and that every teacher can be an advisor. In three years a student could have six advisors. No one has found this a problem.

All of the formal communication that takes place in the school happens in the advisor period. The intercorn has not been used to give information except in rare cases, four or five times a year. It has been the teachers' responsibility to make sure students are informed. Shirley's notes to students are distributed by the advisor. The head secretary files them in the teachers' mailboxes each morning for teachers to collect.

The monthly packages are developed around timely issues. At the beginning of each semester, the packages discuss goal setting; later in the year topics such as behavior expectations, support systems in the school, writing a resume, studying, and preparing for examinations are discussed.

Student registration takes place in the advisor period. Shirley saw this as a real bonus for staff curriculum awareness:

> Because of the advisor program and teachers being responsible for the registration of thirty young people, teachers have to know more than their area. You need to know what the credit requirements are. In fact, the inservicing that is taking place across the curricula is quite extraordinary, and we have that as one of our goals.
>
> So as the new sciences courses came in, on a professional development day we had the people who were teaching the new science courses inservice the whole staff.
>
> The staff could then say, "You know, if you're thinking about science, you might want to think about the Science 10, 20, 30 route as opposed to biology, chemistry, and physics." And they can talk about it with knowledge.

Graduation information is collected in the advisor class, career counselling is touched upon, and the multicultural focus has been set. The teacher advisor has been expected to contact the parents of the advisor class to invite them to Meet the Teacher Night and other school events. Parents have been encouraged to use the advisor as their first contact with the school.

The advisor has become to the high school student what the homeroom teacher is to the elementary and junior high school student: someone who cares about them as individuals.

Ambassadors

As the school continues to work towards improving its image, one of the things Shirley believes is that it is important to have students actively involved in the process. The students can then become ambassadors for the school. It is more complex than merely naming someone an ambassador. Training has to be provided.

One of the teachers volunteered to train and coordinate the ambassador program. Students who have signed up to be ambassadors are trained to work with the public. They learn how to dress appropriately, how to greet people, how to conduct tours, and other relevant skills. The teacher then gives the students the opportunity to serve as ambassador at a variety of functions.

Some of the tasks an ambassador might be involved in include greeting guests at Open House, meeting visitors at the door and escorting them to meeting rooms, welcoming junior high students coming to tour the school, and directing visitors to athletic or artistic events. When Shirley hosts a meeting for the senior high principals, ambassadors will provide assistance in finding the meeting room. It is this group of students who tours applicants for teaching positions and provides a written observation of their reactions to the teachers. They may also make introductions at career fairs, and thank guest presenters.

The group has been made up of any students who are interested. The entire range of students has been included in the ambassadors. Any staff member wanting assistance from the group sees the teacher in charge, and ambassadors are assigned. If it is a major school function, ambassadors are dressed in red sweaters, Jasper Place's school color.

The goal for all the ambassadors has been to be able to be an ambassador for the REB Tournament. In order to qualify, an ambassador has to have volunteered for a specific number of other events. Ambassadors for the REB Tournament have been allowed to host one of the visiting teams, a highly honored position. As many as 100 students have been involved in the ambassador program.

Other students involved in activities outside the school are also expected to be ambassadors. The physical education department head described the athlete contract which each student athlete, the parent, and Shirley sign. The conditions for play are followed by a paragraph which specifies:

> I understand that by fulfilling the above commitments I will be upholding the good name and traditions of the school, and will be enhancing my opportunity to be successful as an academic student, a student athlete, and as a citizen of Jasper Place High School.

He also points out to the students that they might be the only students that outsiders see from the school, and the outsiders will be positively or negatively impacted by their behavior.

The school has gone to great lengths to have students speak positively about Jasper Place. Many of the students have spoken highly of their experiences at the school and said how proud they are to attend. This is a strong message for the community.

Student Teachers

Experiences for student teachers have been different at Jasper Place. In many settings teachers are asked if they want a student teacher, and one is assigned. One of the assistant principals believed that "in general, student teachers tend to get the teachers who are less capable because they view having a student teacher to assist an opportunity for a bit of a rest. Good teachers often believe student teachers get in the way." Because of the way that student teachers' experiences have been organized at Jasper Place, they have had the opportunity to work with more than one teacher and may have experiences in more than one department.

The approach used with student teachers at Jasper Place reflects Shirley's belief that everyone who comes to the school should be comfortable. After the students teachers arrive, they are invited to lunch with Shirley and the assistant principal responsible for their program. It began as a nice thing to do, just to meet them. One of the assistant principals explained:

> That in itself was really unique, because principals don't usually bother. The student teachers come in like little termites and just leave like little termites. If people were happy with them, fine; if not, they could say "no" next time. But by just inviting them in and having a little meeting with them over lunch, interesting things started to develop.
>
> When we started talking to them, we'd discover we learned a whole lot. We'd ask questions like, "How are you finding the discipline with high school kids?" We thought that was a pretty "nothing" question. Well, we'd find out all kinds of really interesting insights into things. One would talk about some really effective strategy a particular teacher was using which we weren't aware of. We found out all kinds of good things to feed back to our own teachers. We could say, "Gee, you know, your student teacher was really impressed with the way you did X. I

> hope you've told everyone in your department. It seems to be working well." We've found a few cases where teachers were having difficulty and we could work with them.
>
> And it was not that we meant that to happen; it just happened. Next time we got even better. Now it's got to the point where our feedback to the university is causing them to rethink some of the things they're doing.

One of the examples of suggestions made by the staff was in reference to a workbook which students were to complete after four visits to the school. The staff found that student teachers did not know what to look for, and staff were spending a great deal of time working with the student teachers to complete this workbook. Instead of this less than effective strategy, at Jasper Place the visits have been structured and the student teachers have been talked to by Shirley, some of the administrators, the police resource officer, and other staff members. The student teachers have toured through various parts of the school. They have spent one afternoon in counselling, one afternoon in the main office, and in other areas. The university has been pleased with the results at Jasper Place and has been considering whether this model should be used in all schools.

The teachers at J.P. have been happy to work with student teachers. The administration has been monitoring to ensure that the school does not take on too many. It is not unusual to have 30 student teachers in the school at one time.

Special activities have been scheduled for student teachers. All student teachers have always been officially welcomed by Shirley. The school administration team has also ensured that each student teacher is granted an interview while he or she has been at Jasper Place. Although the district has not hired many new graduates from the university in the last several years, the school wants to keep a record of outstanding young teachers who will some day be needed.

The university has also had a class operate in the school, using the school as a working lab. This has given student teachers much greater access to activities at the school and more opportunities to work directly with teachers and students.

Principal Exchanges

This year Shirley has begun a series of exchanges with the neighboring junior high school principals. For a half day she becomes the principal of a junior high school, and the junior high principal runs Jasper Place. She outlined her purpose:

> My purpose in doing it is for me to see their schools in operation on a regular day. So I see where our Grade Nines are coming from. I want the principals to see J.P. on a regular day too. When they go back and talk about high schools, they can talk about high schools as a place of business.
>
> There aren't kids in the hallways. They can see that we have consistency in expectations between junior and senior high.
>
> It also gives me a chance to see where the focus is in some of the schools; for example, where they are with Career and Technology Studies. We have students come from about nine junior high schools, and they may be in one class.
>
> I can also hear concerns from the junior high teachers in a more personal way. That's the purpose, and it's been great. It's been a really worthwhile thing to do. I think many junior high principals have a view that high schools are sometimes wild places. It's good for them to come and see that they are very ordered, structured places.

The kind of learning that takes place for both principals has enabled them to do a more effective job of supporting the transition of the students from junior high to senior high.

Parent Involvement

Traditionally, it has been difficult to involve the parents of high school students in their child's school. One of the hardest things for Shirley has been determining whether the school is informing the parents adequately.

She believes that providing multiple avenues for them to receive the information helps. Jasper Place has published a regular newsletter, has had parent resource group meetings, has done telephone fan-outs to parents, has had parent-teacher interviews, and has contacted parents when difficulties have arisen. Aside from personal comments, the district attitude survey has been the only mechanism which the school has had to monitor the satisfaction level of the parents.

Shirley disputed the notion that parents of high school students are not interested:

> It's not true. They're scared of high schools. It's not that they're not interested. In our area, there is a group of parents who never finished high school. They are terrified of high school and to come and talk to you. So we have to do some things to try and break that. We do all the usual things like letters and phone calls. But there have been other things that really work.

The parent resource group has been an effective group. Parents representing each of the main groups in the school, such as advanced placement, special needs, and Pilot, have been invited to be part of the resource group. It is this group that has managed the telephone fan-out system. If there has been a need to communicate about something special happening at the school, it has been a parent phoning a parent. This has been very successful because it conveys a more personalized tone than if a teacher had phoned the parent.

The parent resource group has been very involved in the development of the school budget. One of the parents indicated that although the group does not get very involved in the allocation of money, Shirley has really sought its input regarding important issues pertaining to the budget. This parent pointed out that the parent group would be asked to evaluate programs that are in place and give advice as to any that could be cut or modified. Parents have been encouraged to provide input into the objectives that have been drafted, and this parent felt that parents' comments and suggestions were valued.

The department head of counselling expressed the importance of parents:

> They are what I call the third leg in our three-legged stool, school being one leg, students being the second, parents being the third. If we can get parents involved, it's going to be very positive for the school.

One of the parent groups in the school is the group which has supported the football program. Shirley fondly called them the "football moms and grandmoms." She said that they go to all the games, wearing school colors. Recently, the parents decided that it was time to become patriotic, so now at every game everyone stands up and sings "Oh, Canada" along with the recording that the parents supply. Shirley has been completely supportive and believes that "they've really jollied things up. They have lots of spunk!"

One "football mom" told the following story:

> As the years have progressed, I've become more involved with the school because of the football program. We started a booster club. I'm very directly involved with that and have enjoyed it very much.
>
> Actually, I was very nervous about coming to watch my son play football because I was afraid of embarrassing him by being a parent in the stands. When we were in high school, we used to love going to football games, and I really don't remember seeing any parents in the stands. The stands used to be absolutely jammed full of high school students.
>
> When I walked in to see the game, there wasn't anyone in the stands, just a few parents. A handful of parents sat together, and we enjoyed the game as much as we had in high school. We felt very sad that the students weren't supporting the sport. So we decided to get together, form a booster club, and generate some activity. Actually, what we're doing is selling the game back to the children.

She described the concession stand that they have run that sells hamburgers and pop to the spectators and makes money for the football team. Shirley has given them the opportunity to cater for the events at the school, and last year they made $6,000. The budget this year is $10,000.

Games have been held at 5:00 p.m. and 7:00 p.m., and participation at the 5:00 game has been particularly poor. The "football moms" went to businesses in the area, solicited prizes, and set up contests between the two games. Each game they have also had a number of footballs to throw into the stands each time J.P. scores a touchdown. Last game about 500 students were out to see their team.

The "football moms" have actively recruited people to get involved. They have tried bake sales to raise money but found them too time-consuming for the amount of profit. They have held two bottle drives a year and this year have had 28 bingos to raise funds. One of the highlights has been the banquet that they hold. One parent described the purpose of the event and of the program:

> I spoke at the banquet representing the parents, selling the game to the kids as well. We want to encourage them to think of this as an alumni situation, so they will come back and assist us.
>
> Once the boys are in this program, there is nothing like it as far as supporting each other. Academic challenge, many of them are in the more advanced programs, and they go out together, party a little bit together, and it's just a really nice relationship that they have. I think they have a lot of security in the group.

She also spoke of the appreciation from the kids and from the school. The support and thanks have been valued by the parents involved.

An active parent group has also supported the music program. This group was established when the music program was much larger, but they have continued to be involved in supporting the existing program. They have run a casino every two years and have used the funds raised to provide scholarships, instruments, and band trips for the students.

Parent groups have also met around the special programs at the school. Parents of the Pilot students have built a network to support each other. The parents of the Advanced Placement students have also met regularly.

Another part of parent involvement is the volunteer program. Shirley said that there have been so many volunteers that they often do not know what to do with them. Some parents have read to students, worked in the library, planted flowers, or done typing. It has been a challenge to be sure that parents are not asked to do work that is the work of the support staff. Shirley thought that the volunteers have been most valuable in working one-on-one with students.

One of the parents spoke of the fun of being part of registration procedures at the beginning of the school year. She indicated that a group of parents had volunteered to assist the staff. She found it rewarding to speak with the newly registering Grade 10s, telling them that her kids were really enjoying Jasper Place and wanting them to feel welcome in the school.

With parents knowing that they are welcome and valued at the school, almost any request for assistance will be met with more volunteers than can be accommodated.

Community Involvement and Business Partnerships

Jasper Place has programs in place which takes the school into the community and others which bring the community into the school.

The school in the community. The links between the school and the community have been strengthening at Jasper Place. Shirley perceived that when she arrived the walls were very much closed:

> Like many schools, what happened in the school, happened in the school; what happened in the community, happened in the community. My concern was that we did not have a good reputation in the community, and I believed that one of the things we needed to do was to open the school walls and let the community see what we did. We needed to actively go out into the community ourselves.

One of the assistant principals has been directly responsible for working with the community. He saw Shirley's influence as having made a difference:

> She realizes that the school is an institution within the community. A very, very powerful institution that must be supported by the community. Her whole idea is gaining community support through open communication and developing partnerships with members of the community, or having the community in the school.
>
> We were the first school to have partnerships, and some of the focuses and initiatives we have are quite unique. As the year goes on, we take new ideas, we explore new ideas. That's what I like doing. I get a chance to get out and work on ideas and bring to fruition some good ideas that are going to impact on the students. It's just a pleasure coming to work when you can do those kinds of things. And there's a lot of support from the community for the programs that we're doing in the school.

The first partnership was between Jasper Place and the Misericordia Hospital. This had been formalized the year before Shirley arrived and was a very rigid and specific partnership. This concerned Shirley because she saw hospitals as being as inward looking as schools and feared that there would be just a tunnel running between the two institutions, rather than a fluid and expanding relationship. This partnership has continued and has grown and developed flexibility over the past few years.

As Shirley watched this first partnership, she felt that less formal partnerships could be as effective in meeting the needs of the students. She looked at what the biggest competition to student attendance at school was and found that it was West Edmonton Mall. She explained her strategy:

> I decided that the thing to do was go and get to know the people who own and manage West Edmonton Mall. We went over and found, quite to our surprise, that they value education. They were incredibly supportive of the things we were trying to do, would support us in trying to encourage attendance and good work habits. They supported all the kinds of values good businesses would want in their employees.
>
> They have been extremely generous. Every proposal I've gone to them with, they've supported, whether it's space in the mall at no cost or acknowledging perfect attendance.

The mall has provided support to the school in a variety of ways. To encourage perfect attendance, the mall has provided passes to the Waterpark for students who have perfect attendance. The management has also guaranteed a job to all students with perfect attendance. The school has provided a list of those who qualify.

As well, they have given the school space to teach their marketing course and have provided expertise and personnel to support the course. This has been happening for the past four years.

Space was also provided for Jasper Place's Outreach Program. A computer and furniture were also donated. The outreach class came about because the school was very concerned about the students who dropped out and found it difficult to re-enter school. The school felt that if it went to the mall, it would be easy for students to drop in. The intent was not to force them to enter Jasper Place, but to have them drop back into education. The Outreach Program offered to assist students in registering in any school. The program was extremely successful. The school allowed the space to be used by seniors and other agencies as well. But it was a cost to the school because one of the counsellors was assigned to the program, and, when massive budget cuts were made, Jasper Place could no longer afford to keep the store-front classroom in operation.

Shirley reported that one of their top students last year was recruited through the Outreach Program. This girl was able to complete her high school in two years with an average of 93%, and was the recipient of one of the district's business awards. But for Shirley the strength of the Outreach Program at the mall was the opportunity for parents to drop in and get advice about helping their own children. She saw the school as providing a valuable community service through this program.

Although funding is not currently available to revive the program, the mall has assured the school that the space continues to be available any time that they can use it.

Another kind of business partnership has been sought to assist the school with the school-to-work transition. The assistant principal working with the community commented that, working together,

> we must develop skills programs for students and get them into the work force. We have students that I know would make excellent employees. They would be there every day, they'd be on time; and given a certain task that was within their capabilities, they would do it and do it very well. But we've got to get better at helping them.

A second assistant principal echoed the first: "I see some signs we are starting to work with business and industry so that we can be partners in getting kids along the way to productive futures. We've got a lot of work to do there."

One relationship that has been built is between Jasper Place and the West Edmonton Business Association, an organization of small businesses. This partnership was formed so that businesses could talk to the school about what businesses felt young people needed when they went out in the business world, and the school could talk about how business could help place some of the students who perhaps needed a stint in business and then could return to school. Although the school has not placed many students in business, the school has made contact with a large number of businesses. As a result of this partnership, the school has become aware of federal funding programs. Some money has been made available to help place some of the reluctant learners in appropriate workplaces.

One of these programs, called Opening Doors, has encouraged businesses to hire students on a part-time basis. Students enrolled at Jasper Place between the ages of 16 and 19 who have been self-motivated and interested in working for business have been screened by the school and given employment opportunities by businesses in the west end. The employer has been expected to provide on-the-job skill development and support for the student. Students involved have received one or more of high school credits, wages, or a work-experience certificate.

START, another federal program, has been designed to provide support for young people who have some sort of disability. QUINCOM is a third federal program which has provided Jasper Place's Pilot students with training to enhance their self-esteem and has taught them how to manage time.

Work-experience courses at Jasper Place have enrolled many students. Twelve hundred work stations have been registered, and the coordinator has been establishing new stations all the time. Students who have registered in the course have been given some leads by the work-experience coordinator. The responsibility has been on the student to go to the site and investigate the possibility of a placement. The hospital and the mall have provided work experience, as have members of the West Edmonton Business Association.

Another program just beginning at Jasper Place is the Registered Apprenticeship Program. As Career and Technology Studies expands, this is another opportunity for schools and industry to link. Students have been registered in the apprenticeship program while they have completed courses at school. This has actually cut one year off the total program for the students, a cost-effective way of providing training.

Knowing Jasper Place's interest in community partnerships, an organization of continuing education institutions called The Learning Link has asked Shirley to write an article about business and education for their publication *Business-Based Learning* (Stiles, 1995). The article, in a section called *Off the Cuff,* has given her views:

> Is there a gap? Much has been written about the "gap" between what education provides and what the business world needs. It is a topic often debated in business circles and it is a topic that appears to make educators very defensive. The questions that are raised by educators relate to the very purpose of education: is the primary function of a school to prepare young people for the workplace, or is it to prepare young people to be productive citizens in society? Many would argue that these two ideas are in some way opposed.
>
> I believe that the fault lies with both educators and the business world. Educators have not asked the right questions of the business world and perhaps have not listened to what they have been told by business. Business has generalized their concerns and have not been specific enough. The only gap that exists, in my mind, is that we have not spoken and really tried to understand each other.
>
> I believe that the Conference Board of Canada has done a wonderful job in providing us with a chart which lists the critical skills required of the Canadian workforce.
>
> The skills listed are so similar to the goals of schooling that they are virtually mirror images. We work towards developing these skills in our schools.
>
> Why, then, is there a perceived gap?
>
> We decided at Jasper Place High School that we would make connections with WEBA (West Edmonton Business Association) to see what we can do about the "gap." We have formed a partnership with WEBA. We have dialogued, we have listened,

> we have questioned and we have discovered that *every single business* says that if we provide the students with these skills they can train them for the specifics. They have offered to work with our at-risk students to ease them into the workforce.
>
> In my view, there is no gap; it is a gap developed by adults who give no credit to our young people. My suggestion is that we do not spend our time talking about what's not working—true or imaginary—but get on with the task we both want to resolve: having young Canadians ready and eager to be team players and to be part of a business where they can show they have the ability to question, to think, and indeed have all kinds of skills. I believe we have businesses which are willing to work with these people.
>
> Let's celebrate what is working and let's build on that. (p. 2)

In an ongoing attempt to link with the community, an additional partnership was launched last June with more of a community focus. The school asked the superintendent of the police force, ministers from the local churches, the west-end community league presidents, the Misericordia Hospital, and some of the social agencies to meet and talk about what the group could do to create a west-end community for young people so that they would spend their time more productively. This group is called West End Community Unity. Its motto is "Building a Strong Future for Youth and Communities in West Edmonton." Shirley believes that it has been absolutely tremendous because

> we've discovered that we all have a host of services, but we didn't know about each other's services. Now we're talking to each other, and if we need to know anything, we just phone each other. It's a brokerage of information.

It was this group that organized the response to dating violence so effectively.

The church has a major role in the separate school system but traditionally has not been a partner in the public school system. Shirley has not been reluctant to open the relationship and contact the churches. She has spoken with the ministers of all the churches around the school, inviting them to share information with the school that they would like shared with the students. The results have been interesting for Shirley:

> As a result I'm invited to the Pentecostal Church once a year, when they do a recognition of teachers, which is very nice. I have been invited to be a part of the sermon. The Baptist Church invites me to functions. I think that it's important that we do recognize that our kids do go to church. We also have a religious group which meets in the school.
>
> I've also contacted the imam from the Muslim group. They've been quite tremendous about doing some things in their Saturday morning classes. They talk about how Canadian schools work, what is expected of young people, how to treat people, how to deal with females in authority. Part of what we are doing is being proactive. I decided that this was a layer of our community that we could not afford to ignore.
>
> The church community is just below the surface. An amazing number of students are involved. The more I've talked about it, the more I've gone out, the more kids I know about. Once a year, all the kids in the world are invited by the churches to stand around flagpoles and pray for their country. Our students had asked me for years if they could do that, and I'd said, "Fine." This year they asked me to join them, so off I went. I was surprised how many kids came, how many stayed until all the buses came, and everybody saw us standing around the flagpole, saying a prayer for our country, our school, and our teachers. More and more kids joined.
>
> I've got a feeling that the more we are able to articulate our values, the more comfortable people will feel saying, "I'm a whatever." When we started to get kids to record their community involvement, we realized how many kids were involved in church.

The community in the school. The school has also opened its doors to the community. The facility is far larger than it needs to be to accommodate the student population, and they have been actively encouraging others to use the space in the school.

Before Shirley arrived, a daycare was given a lease for one wing of the school. It is a city-run daycare, and Shirley viewed it as one of the best in the city. They run a daycare and a kindergarten and currently take children as young as 19 months. In response to a request from the school, an infant group, beginning at age 13 months, will be started next year. This will enable more of the students who are mothers to have their children looked after so that they can return to school more easily.

As well as the classroom space, a playground has been built outside in an attached space. The daycare also leases a kitchen facility in another wing.

A solid relationship has been established between the daycare and the school. Work-experience students provide assistance in the daycare. Pilot students provide a reading program in the daycare. This has helped both the children in the daycare and the esteem of the Pilot students. The Food Preparation students and staff have been involved with the food preparation in the daycare kitchen as well. When the school has an Open House, the daycare has an Open House. Four or five staff have had children attending the daycare, and two of Shirley's grandchildren have also attended.

The daycare has used the school as a venue for its cookie sales, has had time in one of the gyms when it has been too cold to go outside, and has been an audience for the music program.

Shirley has never had a problem with the daycare. The children have been comfortable in the school and have had a softening effect on everyone as they walk in the long hallways holding hands. As Shirley said: "These kids walk through the hallways, and everybody just melts."

On Valentine's Day, after the assemblies, we ran into a parade of hand-holding little people from the daycare. They were heading for the office with Valentine "pins" and entertainment for the office staff. Even the toughest looking high school students paused and said "Hi" to the parade of children. Everyone stopped to ensure that all the little ones made it safely to the office.

After the three classes distributed the "pins" and collected coins for the Heart Fund, each sang a song. Shirley's twin grandchildren's group began their song. One of her grandchildren put his fingers in his mouth, made noises, and did not sing. With delight, Shirley said: "He's mine!"

As well as the daycare, the sixth floor of the tower has also been leased. The dietetics program for all the hospitals has operated from there. The school was selected as the location because of their partnership with the Misericordia Hospital. The dietitians have been prepared to work in the school's CALM (Career and Life Management) courses, talking to students about food disorders. They have used the students to gather information, and the school has become the hub for their work in the west end. They have had a classroom and two offices in the school and have been truly community based.

The fifth floor of the tower is about to be occupied by the Alberta Crafts Council. This plan was undertaken because this space was also underutilized. It was part of the vocational area and was closed four years ago. The room has a huge floor space, electrical outlets, fume hoods, and small offices around the perimeter. It was seen as a perfect space for artists. The art teacher was asked to suggest a few organizations that might be interested in the space. He contacted the Alberta Crafts Council and was a part of the first meeting with the group. He was disappointed that Shirley had not attended because the group did not seem anxious to take the space with all the restrictions that seemed to be fixed. He spoke to Shirley and she then spoke with the group, alleviating many of their concerns. He credited Shirley's leadership and personality with turning the situation around.

Arrangements are now underway that would give the Council the space in exchange for providing clinics for the art students. Instead of students going out of the building to see a whole range of art, the artists will be in the building. It will be an advantageous arrangement for both.

One more space is being looked at by Dr. Randy Gregg for a sports-medicine facility in the west end. The school has incredible weight room equipment, as well as office space. Again, the arrangement will be that the school provides the space and in exchange the facility uses the school's name and provides some support for the physical education program. Dr. Gregg has been interested in proactive sports medicine for youth and would like the site to become the focus for the west end.

Teachers, too, have involved a wide variety of community members in the classrooms. The physical education department has invited a person from the AIDS Network to speak with the students, the social studies department has hosted political figures, and the English department has included professional writers to enhance their programming. As well, classes have gone out into the community for field trips.

A new group has been getting the attention at Jasper Place this year—the seniors. Shirley indicated that

> we decided when we reviewed our school last year that the one group that we hadn't touched was the senior population. We had two concerns. The one was that we felt seniors in the community were frightened of young people. This was something we picked up when we talked to businesses or when we just watched. When we saw a group of our young people and some seniors were coming toward them, the seniors just withdrew. They don't understand their language, they don't understand their clothing; they're just scared.
>
> And we thought this was not good. What we've got to do is show that kids are okay, and show kids that older people are really valuable. One of our aims was to close the generation gap.
>
> But the other aim was to use their skill. This group has been totally underutilized. There are two groups of seniors. There are

> the shut-ins, and there are the guys who never should have retired. They've got so much energy. We decided to go after both groups in a different way.

As a part of their community involvement, students have begun to go to the shut-ins. They have done a variety of things: window painting at Christmas, providing paintings to decorate rooms, presenting band concerts, assisting with wrapping presents at Christmas. The "teen moms" have even taken their babies over to play with the seniors. Other students have taken the seniors for walks.

The second phase of the project has been getting seniors into the school. A social group of retired people called the Esso Self-Starters has been meeting next door to the school. The school approached the group and asked if they would come to the school and talk. They were taken on a tour of the school and offered access to all of Jasper Place's customer service. This included appointments in the beauty-culture lab, car repair, welding, graphic arts, and invitation printing. As well, when asked, the seniors told the school that there were three areas in which they would like to be involved. The first was art; they would like to paint in the school. The school has a gallery in one of the hallways, and Shirley thought that it was great for students to see the seniors painting in the gallery.

The second interest was music. Many of the group wanted to learn to play an instrument. The school will put them in the beginner band because it does not matter how big the class is, and they can learn with the students.

As well, the seniors were interested in computers. The computer teacher agreed that he had space in one of his classes, and 11 seniors are now in class. Shirley reported that "the buddying that has gone on in the classroom is just great." They have been doing so well that they have even asked for report cards! More importantly, they have now become completely comfortable around the kids. One was overheard asking his student buddy: "Why do you have an earring in your nose?" The students have also become comfortable having older people around. Many of them have not had access to their grandparents, and this has been an opportunity for them to know someone from the senior-citizen ranks.

The school has also received help from the Society for the Retired and Semi-Retired. The possibilities for Shirley for involving the seniors have been endless. Students have visited all the seniors' homes in the vicinity; the connection with the West End Community Unity has opened some interesting doors. One particularly good relationship has been built with the police. The school found out that one member of the police force has volunteered to put deadbolts on the door of any senior citizen who has had a break-in. The job is very time consuming. Students have now been working on a team with the police, as a part of their community involvement, to assist in installing the deadbolts.

The school this year invited the seniors to present the Remembrance Day ceremony, one which will not soon be forgotten. The seniors have also been invited to the football games, where some have been adopted to help the "football moms." Christmas concerts and the REB Tournament also have had seniors involved. Shirley would like to have the seniors feel completely comfortable in the school.

She believes that the frontier must be broken at many places and that the principal has to be actively involved in getting the community to believe that a partnership is possible. One of the parents remarked that the school has taken great strides in preparing students for the community and involving the community in the school.

With the philosophy, the people, the practices, and the programs in place at Jasper Place, the school has become a smooth-functioning unit. Before her arrival, the school was "not a bad place" but since she has been principal, the programs and practices are clearly aligned with a person centered philosophy which demands the best from everyone, and where trust and responsibility are in equal measure. Shirley's leadership was the primary motivator for the change. She is an interesting study.

Shirley Stiles: The Person

Personal Background

Umntu ngumntu ngabantu: "A person is a person because of other people." This Zulu truth is printed on Shirley Stiles' blue memo pad. When I received a note from Shirley, written on the blue pad, I at first read the words she had written. Then the message in the upper right-hand corner caught my eye. As I reflected, I realized that that message was more important in understanding Shirley than her words on the pad.

Shirley was born in South West Africa. This was originally a German colony, and the first school she attended was a German kindergarten. World War II had broken out, and for Shirley it was a very different time:

> The fathers of my German friends were fighting for the German army or were interned, and my father was fighting for the South African army. The entire city council had been taken and were either being held or had been interned. My grandfather was made commissioner of the town we lived in. He was a Welshman. Those first few years of schooling were really interesting.

After a year of instruction in German, she attended an English school, until her father returned from the War. They moved to a little village in South Africa, and she attended the village school. Grades 1 to 6 were in one classroom, and two languages were taught, English and Afrikaans. One week the instruction was in English, the next week in Afrikaans. Her parents knew that they would be moving and wanted her in a more stable learning situation, hence, Shirley, at the age of nine, was sent to boarding school. She was advanced a grade ahead of her age mates because of the learning she had done in the one-room school. She commented that "I learned everything from the next row up the line."

Her boarding school was a Catholic convent in Johannesburg. She was there for the rest of her schooling, going home twice a year. During her high school years she was made head girl under their system of prefects. She is the only non-Catholic girl in the history of that Catholic school who has ever been made a head girl.

The school was very academic; students had no options. Everyone took seven subjects, although six were required for matriculation. "An insurance policy," said Shirley. The subjects included English, Afrikaans, Latin, two mathematics, and two science courses. From a class of 24, everybody went on to post-secondary education.

Shirley attended university in South Africa, taking a degree in Arts, majoring in history and geography. A one-year education diploma followed, and for four months of that year she taught in a segregated Indian girls' school. She was approached by a very progressive private school to begin teaching there after completing university. She married and continued to teach there until her first child was born.

The next stop was the University of Illinois, where her husband completed his Ph.D. and Shirley did a master's degree in political science and history. They returned to South Africa, and Shirley did some teaching at the university while having the rest of the family. In 1968 they came to Canada.

When they arrived in Edmonton, she applied to both school boards. Edmonton Catholic Schools offered her a job first, so she joined the system. What a shock! It was her first experience teaching students not in uniform, her first experience with boys in the class, and her first experience with junior high students. It was also her first experience with Canadian social studies. She found the students quite out of control compared to what she was used to. Her school in inner-city Edmonton was vastly different from the private schools in Johannesburg. She moved to high school and after eight years became a practicum associate at the University of Alberta.

On her return to the school district she was told that she could never hold an administrative position in the district because she was not Catholic. Although she felt that this was discriminatory, she was told by the Alberta Teachers' Association that Catholic boards have the right to specify.

She applied to Edmonton Public Schools and was hired. Although she had no experience, she was hired as a high school counsellor. After a short time she became a social studies consultant. Her school administrative career began with an appointment as assistant principal at J. Percy Page High School, followed by the principalship of Bonnie Doon High School. She then spent three years in central services as Assistant Superintendent of Consulting Services, becoming principal at Jasper Place in the fall of 1990.

Her parents still live in South Africa, and she makes regular trips back to visit. In February one of the junior high principals, knowing of her background, phoned and asked her to do a presentation on South Africa for his Grade 9s. She agreed.

Shirley and Family

Socializing with the staff is something that Shirley avoids. Her family is very important to her, and many of her spare moments are spent with them. She said:

> I'm really lucky, I have a husband I can share things with. He always puts things into perspective. If I go home and say, "I don't know what we're going to do about this kid. He's a terrible problem," Mike says, "How about the other nineteen hundred?"

When I asked Shirley about a mentor, although she mentioned a principal she had worked with who encouraged her to try some of her creative ideas, her first response was:

> I think my husband. Probably the person I've bounced most of my ideas off is my husband. He's not in the system. I need somebody who's removed, who can say "yes" or "no." Now I think I use the team very much to try things on. But when I go home, if I need to talk something through, I'll talk with him. Sometimes I think mentors need to be outside your own profession.

Shirley as Teacher

Although Shirley believes that the job of principal is the best job in the district, she loves to teach. This year the leadership team did not want her to teach because of the decrease in the number of department heads, but she was planning to teach again next year. Her recent teaching has been team teaching with one of the assistant principals, and it seems to matter little which course they teach—math, science, personal living skills, or whatever is needed. The two of them work together very well and find sharing the class a good strategy for them and for the students.

Time Management

One of the things of which almost everyone spoke is the amount of time Shirley gives to her job. Everyone knows that she arrives by 6:00 a.m. each day. A science teacher described her as "a very effective and a very efficient lady." He suggested that she must have had time-management courses to help her see ways of doing more. He continued: "I marvel at what she can do in a day." But this was contrasted with the fact that he knew, "But if I needed a quick minute, I know it would be there."

An assistant principal shared the following:

> I don't think I've ever beat her here in the morning. I know she's been here at 5:00 and earlier sometimes, and she's here late at night. I know she comes in on the weekends. She puts in a lot of hours. The hours she puts into the organization, being here in the morning, and working through a lot of that paperwork helps get some of that out of the way. Then she has more time for people.

Shirley admitted to planning and manipulating the time available to her best advantage. But she minimizes the time she spends:

> I love managing time. I spend my whole life playing with time. It's the most exciting thing because no one else can play with your time, only you can. And I've gotten better and better, but over the years you have different priorities. When I was raising my family, that was my priority, and I didn't even look at administration. Then I was balancing how to get my marking done and spending quality time with my kids. Now I think I balance spending time with my husband, looking after myself, and not letting school eat me up. And I think if I don't do that, I'm not a very good person, because I'd be a very poor role model for the staff.
>
> So I come in at 6:00, but I leave at 4:00. And I used to leave guilty. Now I leave very noisily, visibly. They need to know we have a life.
>
> I never come in on a Saturday. I only take reading work home on the weekend. I try to give myself a break. But my main thing is walking out of here at, not a ridiculous time, because I walk in at a ridiculous time. But that's my choice.

The apparent contradiction between the accounts may result from the "myth" of Shirley's presence at school held by staff as much as from the reality.

There are some tasks that Shirley has determined are worthy of her time and will not be delegated. She reads all the mail received in the school:

> An enormous amount of mail comes across my desk, because I think it's important that I at least have an idea of what's coming into the school. Now that I've been here for a while, the head secretary will say, "These things are here, but are straight department things." But in the main she gives me most of the stuff, and I go through it very quickly. I only look at mail once, so it either goes to somebody's mail box or it goes in a file to read or it's in a "to do" pile. And if it's in the "to do" pile, I've decided whether it's this week or it can wait.
>
> I find that if I don't do it regularly, I don't get through it. If you don't see all the mail, I believe you are missing some really key things. I ask people to make sure that everything comes through me so that I have a good feeling of what's happening, and I can support them.

Shirley has the same view of the importance of her being the only contact for the media. No one in the school is to speak with the media unless it goes through her. She is open to the media and will direct them to the appropriate person. She finds this more comfortable for herself and for the staff. She finds that she can then follow up with the person involved to find out how it went more easily when she is aware of the contact each time.

Many issues arise each day. Balancing the requirements is a dilemma. "How do you juggle all the balls?" is one of the key questions with which Shirley is faced on a daily basis.

Distancing Herself

Although everyone to whom I spoke believes that Shirley is open and completely involved in the school, she spoke of the distance she keeps between herself and students and staff. She said in discussing students:

> I think you've got to keep that distance. I know that the kids call me Shirley Stiles out of this building because I hear it from the parents and the community. I sign everything Shirley Stiles. But no kid has ever said it to me; it's Mrs. Stiles. And that's the way

> it should be. I think they feel comfortable with the distance, and so do I.
>
> I think if you don't keep that distance, and you get too friendly with kids, it's really hard if something goes wrong to step back and do the other part of it.

She distances herself not only from students, but also from staff. She talked of the distance she maintains from the staff:

> I don't socialize with the staff. I made that decision years ago. I think it's easier for them if I distance myself, and they can do their own socializing. Sometimes it's lonely, because I know there are things I am not part of. But at the same time I think it's important that they can do those things and I'm not there. I think sometimes if you're too close, it's kind of tough for staff.
>
> I socialize with the administration team. We will go out for drinks sometimes or we'll go out for lunch. They're a very nice group.

Shirley never appears to be holding back in her relationships. But she never reveals a lot about herself. Her skill at questioning focuses most conversations on the other person rather than on herself.

Professional Involvement

Shirley discriminates among professional organizations. She belongs to the National Association of Secondary School Principals. Although she has not been to their conferences, she finds their publications extremely useful. She subscribes to a variety of educational magazines as well.

Locally, she is a member of the Education Society but has rejected organizations such as the Public School Administrators Association, Alberta Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Canadian Teachers Federation, and Canadian School Administrators as not being meaningful for her. She indicated that "I'm prepared to try them for a year. But if they don't impress me, I'm not prepared to get involved."

She also is on the executive of the Rotary Club. She was the first woman to belong to the Mayfield Chapter and finds it refreshing to step into the business world once a week.

As well, she is an adjunct professor at the University of Alberta. She is currently serving on the advisory board for the Fine Arts Department because they are planning some links between fine arts and the new high school Career and Technology Studies.

Requests are frequent from the community, service clubs, the university, other schools, and the district for Shirley's time and expertise. If it is in the Jasper Place community, she rarely rejects an invitation. She finds it difficult to say no. She knows that the connections built within the community help to strengthen the school's image. She sees her obligation as first to the school, then to the community.

Future Plans

One of the exciting opportunities that has come Shirley's way is an invitation to become a Master Practitioner in Los Angeles, California. A group from UCLA visited Edmonton in the fall and visited Jasper Place. When they returned to Los Angeles, Shirley received a letter from the manager of the school-management program issuing the invitation. Master Practitioners are principals and teachers who have been involved in significant school reform and can coach school leaders who are beginning the restructuring process. Seven are currently in place; Shirley would be the eighth.

In March Shirley visited Los Angeles to meet the group and see the program. They have asked her to go for a year or to teach a summer course. She is still thinking about her reply.

June 1995 will see Shirley move from Jasper Place. She received an appointment as a principal coordinator in the district and will be coaching principals for the next several years.

She is also interested in volunteer work, when she has time. She believes that there are tremendous opportunities for people with organizational skills to serve the community. What she expects of her students, she expects of herself.

CHAPTER 5

REFLECTIONS AND DISCUSSION

Introduction

My purpose in this study was to understand the actions of an effective senior high school principal and see how the actions that she selected tied into her overall goals for the school. I wanted to understand how she spent her time and in what activities she chose to engage. As important, I wanted to know what she did not do. What I discovered was that what appeared to be seamless and simple was deliberately planned and executed. The skills of Shirley Stiles make Jasper Place function smoothly. I decided that in the intricate setting of Jasper Place, Shirley Stiles' leadership was the central diamond.

Qualities

Diamonds are precious stones which have a number of qualities. These qualities include clarity, brilliance, hardness and durability, and value. These qualities are also found within the leadership provided by Shirley Stiles.

The value of a diamond is in the cut and in the polishing. Shirley has visited diamond factories in South Africa and spoke about the cutting of the stones:

> When you actually get to the part where they are working on the diamonds, the most critical thing that has to happen is someone has to decide how to cut the diamond. That is an extremely tense thing. They mark the diamond, then they will sit as a team of diamond cutters and decide where the cuts should be. They determine if they are going to cut it into several pieces or few, and where they are going to cut. If they do it incorrectly, they shatter it. The whole group includes masters and younger cutters who are being trained. Once they've decided how to do the split, it is tried.
>
> No one ever works on one diamond from start to finish. The aim is that one person would work on one series of facets, take it

> to someone else, then it gets passed down again. The end result is that when they weigh it, it must be just over the carat, never under. If it is just over, it has one value; if it is under, it would be a totally different lower value.

For Shirley there have been many people involved in the growth and development of her leadership. The mentoring of her husband has been instrumental for Shirley. And one of her high school principals encouraged her creativity and risk taking. Two of her daughters now teach with Edmonton Public Schools. Public education is an important value in the Stiles family.

Shirley has developed some characteristics that assist her in her leadership. Shirley's observation and questioning skills are so finely developed that she learns something from everyone with whom she comes into contact. And her solid reputation provides her with opportunities to meet with many varied individuals. She takes the learnings from others and transforms them into meaningful opportunities for Jasper Place to pursue. She encourages others to try the ideas she has synthesized.

The staff spoke of the importance of the role of the principal. "I believe that any school is only as strong as its administration," was repeated by teachers. The companion belief is that their school is strong. The adage "As goes the principal, so goes the school" is demonstrated both by actions and by beliefs.

One of the teachers believed that good leaders become leaders because they have a need:

> I believe in my own mind that people—and this includes our principal—are in leadership positions because they perceive the need for them to do something good in an area that they believe in. In order to do that, they have to go for a leadership position. The ones who are successful learn different techniques and develop the qualities it takes to get there. I believe that you learn all your life. I'm sure that Shirley learned a lot of that from her family. And I'm sure she learned it from teachers that she was

> with years ago, and administrators she was with. She was probably with administrators where she also said, "That's not the way I want to do it. This is what works. This is what's positive." That I really believe.

Another staff member has had the opportunity to work with Shirley in three different settings and commented on the way her leadership style has varied, depending on the context and the people around her. Over the three experiences he has seen her become more flexible, more comfortable, more able to build consensus than she was in earlier roles. He continued:

> I think one of the most interesting things is that I see her very differently than I did when she was at Bonnie Doon. I don't know how much of this has changed because I've grown a little older and a little more accommodating; perhaps the viewer is different, but so is the "viewee." I see Shirley as much more comfortable in what she's doing. She is much more receptive to taking ideas and working with individuals. She is much more feminine in her leadership style. This comfort comes across to the teachers and makes them feel comfortable in what they're doing.
>
> Depending on the needs of the school, she is able to take different skills that are in her repertoire and decide which ones she needs.

What is it about Shirley's leadership that has made her such a valuable find? The flexibility that she demonstrates in trying new things seems to come from the same source that enables her to match her skills to the context in which she finds herself. I think that one of the skills she has polished is her acute observation and analysis of her environment. Bolman and Deal (1993) described the importance of leaders making sense of the environment. "Leaders in particular are required to make sense of ambiguous, complex, and puzzling events. When they frame accurately and respond appropriately, puzzles and problems become promising opportunities" (p. 23). Until Shirley knows the situation and the people, she leaves herself open to as many possibilities as she can.

Mazzarella and Grundy (1989) concluded their portrait of a leader by describing effective educational leaders as those who are "outgoing, good at working with people, and have good communication abilities and skills. As proactive people, they are not afraid to stretch the rules, but also understand the compromises that must be made to get things done" (p. 27). Although they indicated that this is only a sketch of an imaginary leader, I would suggest that Shirley Stiles may be one real leader who fits these characteristics.

One teacher saw her as very open and honest: "What you see of Shirley is what she is. She lives her job." Perhaps it is her age, her experiences, or her wisdom that makes the difference.

Does the fact that she is a woman make a difference, either to her or to the staff? Shirley spoke of the "old boys network" that existed in the school when she arrived, particularly within the physical education and vocational areas. However, over the past five years the balance has shifted from a predominantly male staff to one with almost an equal number of males and females. Shirley has deliberately sought to equalize the gender balance as she sought staff who were committed to her goals for the school.

She sensed that the staff initially feared that she would not be "tough enough" to deal with the difficult issues, but she believes that the staff no longer feel that she is too soft. She suggested that because she distances herself socially from everyone on staff, there is no one group who would think that she favors them over another. This lack of social contact keeps her removed from friendships on the staff. She has left a space around herself, a protection.

Interestingly, her observation about the district's male high school principals is that they are more rigid in the "old boy" sense than the school staff. "You wouldn't understand; you're a woman," has been both stated and implied. Shirley believes that she has been able to overcome their biases and gain their respect, in spite of their continuing chauvinistic behavior with other women in the high school principalship. She has their confidence and respect as a colleague.

Working with parents from the Muslim community has posed special challenges for Shirley. Males have been reluctant to meet with her because of their cultural background. Shirley has attempted to alleviate their concerns by inviting the male parent to bring another male with him to the conference. As well, she has reinforced the importance of discussing the role of women in leadership with the Canadian Arab Friendship Society.

I think that it is her confidence and comfort within herself that allows her to disregard those attitudes or work to eliminate them. Shirley was adamant that she does not play a role that is not herself when she is at school. She does not see herself as having a work personality and another personality for the rest of her life. Her office is decorated in a feminine manner. Teddy bears, shelves of ornaments, pictures of her grandchildren, plants, and a full candy jar on her desk make her office warm and welcoming.

When I discussed the issue of Shirley's gender with my pilot principal, he said that he did not think that it mattered that she was biologically female. He thought that she was one of the few women in administration who had no dichotomy between her personal and her professional life. She is willing to build on personal relationships outside the school, display her sensitivity and her gentleness, and show clearly that she is at peace with herself.

When I asked the female assistant principal how she viewed gender and the principalship, she said:

> I think the hardest part of being a principal is developing the support, and I think women do that better, because we have been socialized as helpers. And if something goes wrong, we fix it. Males were not; they have the right and the power to say the way the world should work, and they just do it.

Shirley did not choose a career in administration until her children were grown. Balancing home life and work life for women in administration is supported in the research (Coursen et al., 1989; Ortiz & Marshall, 1988; Reynolds, 1995).

Shirley continues to be shaped by the reading she does, the people she encounters, and the experiences she has. She sees herself as a learner and believes that to remain static is to perish. Barth (1990) pointed out the importance of principals as learners, and "the extraordinary influence of modelling behavior" (p. 72).

Clarity

One of the factors which is considered in determining the quality of any diamond is clarity. Shirley's vision for Jasper Place is perfectly clear. It is not enough that she can articulate the direction that Jasper Place is headed, but every staff member, including those who are not part of the teaching staff, know what is important. One of the assistant principals described Shirley's strategy: "A good principal sets the values and constantly reminds us to make decisions based on the values. And from that grows all these wonderful things that we're able to do in the school."

Although the total vision was not expressed from the outset, Shirley knew what was important. However, she also knew that it was vital to have the support of all the staff before she began to implement change. "Win 'em first; then go for the cracks" was the advice she gave me when I asked how soon she felt that she could make changes. "Change in the professional organization does not sweep in from new administrators taking office to announce wide reforms" (Mintzberg, 1989, p. 192).

For Shirley, having a staff that works together is key. She spoke of making changes at a high school being like "moving an ocean liner." She thought that after the first year she was not sure that she had accomplished anything. But she knew that it took time to get people on side. Ask questions, listen, get their confidence, then you can move.

Greenleaf (1977), in describing the leader as servant, said that one of the most difficult questions to answer is "What are you trying to do?"

> A mark of leaders, an attribute that puts them in a position to show the way for others, is that they are better than most at pointing the direction. As long as one is leading, one always has a goal. It may be a goal arrived at by group consensus, or the leader, acting on inspiration, may simply have said, "Let's go this way." But the leader always knows what it is and can articulate it for any who are unsure. By clearly stating and restating the goal the leader gives certainty and purpose to others who may have difficulty in achieving it for themselves. (p. 15)

Planning takes time and expertise. Shirley never acts without knowing precisely what she is doing. She is deliberate and considered in everything she does. Her strength is that she is so polished that her actions look natural and spontaneous. They are anything but that.

Shirley cannot leave an issue or a problem until she has a plan clearly in place. Her team provides the vehicle to bounce ideas and work through alternatives. But I suggest that she really has already preselected an alternative before she consults the team, and her primary purpose is for the team to react and polish her original solution. She has surrounded herself with staff who have the strengths which she lacks such as dealing with details. She does not hesitate to use their strengths for solving problems resulting in success for students.

The development of the school budget demonstrates her clarity. When the 1995-96 objectives were discussed for inclusion in the budget, Shirley did not hold a discussion about selecting completely new objectives. She asked the staff to react to the 1994-95 objectives to indicate which should be maintained, eliminated, or modified. It is possible that all could have been recommended for elimination, but Shirley's choice of strategy gave the strong message that all current objectives could not be wrong.

She also never anticipated dispute, which I found interesting. Over the past five years she has trained the staff well. Each one knows the limits of her tolerance. The individuals who initially would not comply with the requirements of her philosophy have by now left Jasper Place or have accepted her direction. I observed no challenges issued by staff, nor did I hear any complaints about the vision for the school when speaking with staff, students or parents.

Brilliance

The brilliance of a diamond results from the cut and the polish. If the stone is cut with precision, the sparkle and flash emerge with the polishing. To speak of the brilliance of Shirley's leadership is to focus on the polishing. She is a polished administrator. One of the assistant principals, in describing how she tried to learn how Shirley ticked, commented that she was "an accomplished ticker." She credited Shirley's success to past learning and experience. Shirley believed that you learn from your failures more than from your successes. She recommended keeping a record of your problems, reviewing them when you feel calm, and looking for alternatives before you encounter a similar situation. It is this considered analysis that makes it possible for her to deal with new issues less painfully.

All staff are involved in this polishing process and all have benefitted. This is the refractive power of the diamond. The assistant principals model their behavior on Shirley's and her influence is felt by all. One of the department heads sees himself as a "mini-Shirley," modelling his leadership within his department on hers within the school. Teachers have become polished too. Several have taken the "Shirley note" into their own repertoire and many more staff attend school functions. The school staff reflect and enhance the brilliance of Shirley's leadership. Through this process they have enhanced their own leadership skills.

A diamond enhances light. Through the process of refraction, light passes through the stone and shines back. What was a little light becomes much more. Ideas that come to Shirley leave her enhanced. Just as a diamond through dispersion separates the light into myriad twinkles of color, she too disperses her ideas, separating them, encouraging others to pick them up and shine. She is a voracious reader. An idea from a journal article can spark a major theme at the school. A visit to another district can encourage a new approach.

She is not a solitaire. The brilliance of Shirley's leadership comes not only from her, but also from the jewels that she has set around her. Each enhances the other. She too polishes the others, and as they learn from her, they become more refractive. They have begun to work together reflecting and enhancing each other. DePree (1989) said that in thinking about leaders and the variety of gifts that people bring to corporations and institutions: "The art of leadership lies in polishing and liberating and enabling those gifts" (p. 10).

Another aspect of the brilliance of Shirley's leadership is her sense of timing. She seems to have an intuitive understanding about when things should happen. She knew that the privatization of the cafeteria was so sensitive that she waited until her third year in the school to make the change. The staff commented that she is five steps ahead on most things. I believe that she has the whole picture in her mind, knows what must be done, and orchestrates the moves at the most opportune time.

There are also serendipitous events that work to Shirley's advantage. Dr. Randy Gregg's arrival at the school, welcome but not planned, was fortuitous. However, positive things happen in situations where other positive things have preceded. Shirley's optimism encourages people to act in positive ways.

Hardness and Durability

Diamonds cannot be shaped, except by another diamond. This hardness and durability is demonstrated by many of Shirley's stances. She is courageous in the face of challenge and firm when decisions require firmness. It is her consistency that people admire. "Persistence and perseverance on behalf of one's values and beliefs are qualities of leadership that transcend different situations" (Sergiovanni, 1990, p. 12).

Several parents have wanted their children's absences from school excused because they have been in high-level sporting competitions or acting as Canada's representatives in some way. Although Shirley is supportive of their involvement in these activities, and teachers have made allowances for students to complete work on their own schedule, she will not indicate on the report card that students have been present when they have not been at school. The absence will be acceptable but not excused and erased. Even though she has faced this issue on more than one occasion, she has remained firm and refused to change her position; "An absence is an absence" is her belief. Had she swayed once, she would have faced other situations where other absences would have been seen to be excusable as well.

Student expulsions have gone forward, in spite of threats to her personally. The end result was positive for the school, but there was an incredible amount of tension during the process. She was greatly admired for her courage.

The physical education department head told another story of Shirley's firmness. District policy prohibits high schools from charging students for instruction. Many schools have charged students and called the charge something other than instruction, to enable students to experience new activities. Jasper Place had done so. But as the department head told it,

> She is very knowledgeable with the workings of the district and the rules and regulations. And that causes no end of consternation for me. We were the first school that introduced Discover Scuba, and when Shirley found out that we were paying for instruction, we were the first school that had to drop it.

In recalling Shirley's arrival, even though it was not a welcoming environment, the head secretary spoke of her strength: "I don't think it took her long to bring people around and let them see that she was going to be a very, very fine, strong individual that was going to do wondrous things for J. P." This strength is not just for herself but is encouraged in others. Her demand for ownership is based on understanding her values. She steps aside so others, in particular the assistant principals, can practice the values and she requires the same standards in the tough decisions from them.

Value

In a recent article by Gillies (1995), Mintzberg recalled how he did not consider himself competitive. He said: "I never set out to be the best, that is too low a standard. I just set out to be good" (p. 27). Shirley Stiles is good. As well, she does not waste time competing with others, nor does she encourage competition among staff.

The value that Shirley Stiles' leadership has at Jasper Place has appreciated over the last five years. She has earned a level of acceptance at the school. The district attitude survey shows high levels of satisfaction from staff, students, and parents. What she has done is to behave with integrity. She has been honest and forthright in her dealings with everyone. As a result, people trust her. That trust has led to loyalty both to her and to the school. Some call it school pride. It is also mutual respect.

Part of Shirley's value is that she has enabled others to shine. She acknowledges the efforts of others and encourages everyone to grow and develop. Her notes tell others that their contribution is valued by the school. Barth (1990) said that an able principal "has the capacity to create conditions that elicit the best from most students, teachers, and parents most of the time" (p. 64).

Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991), summarizing things that effective principals were found to do, indicated that two things stand out:

> They showed an active interest by spending time talking with teachers, planning, helping teachers get together, and being knowledgeable about what was happening. And they all figured out ways of reducing the amount of time spent on routine administrative matters; they made sure that change had an equal priority. (p. 168)

The Setting

When a gem is placed into a setting, it becomes a jewel. Depending on the compatibility between the setting and the jewel, the value can increase dramatically. So it is with the school community and the principal. Jasper Place and Shirley Stiles work together well. In Weick's (1983) terms, it is a "loosely-coupled system." The position Shirley has carved for herself has enhanced the opportunities for success for those within the school. One of the assistant principals believed that "you don't grow to be an administrator; the job of administrator becomes what you are. The job of administration in this school is driven by what Shirley is." She went on to say that people in these positions develop the positions based on their personalities. "When you have a school that's run by a dogmatic person, the school becomes dogmatic."

The staff fear her leaving. Even before her new position was announced, staff spoke with trepidation about losing her. One said:

> I firmly believe if you parachuted Shirley out of here and gave us a punitive belief thinker, our school climate would change. The staff and people here would try as much as possible to hold it the way it is, to hold it static, because it's comfortable, it's nice. It's a very nice way to operate. But if the guy in the office at the end of the hall started to behave in ways that were inconsistent with the way we believed, we would put up the defenses again. And as soon as the defenses went up, the school climate would change.
>
> I think the principal is key. And I think our role as the team is to support the principal so she can keep the belief system.

Another staff member felt that with Shirley's move to a district position,

> now this is a new beginning, and we look optimistically at the district and hope it could be like our school, because we like our school, and we think we're doing the right thing. Now we can get the whole district thinking the same way, with the support of parents, teachers, students, and everybody. I think Shirley will play a very large part in that.

Within the school Shirley has support from her staff and has added to the complement of team players. As a diamond surrounded by other gems, she has been able to show that other diamonds in a setting can also be brilliant. Her leadership is shared and reflected among many. The consistency and clarity of her goals and what they demand from staff has meant that over five years, those who didn't want to work within this leadership philosophy have transferred while others have agreed to work within these requirements. The stability of the staff has indicated how much teachers are willing to adapt to the principal's requirement. The alternative is to transfer, a more difficult task for high school specialists given fewer options. Shirley's challenge shows that the development of a "school sense" is a constant battle against a narrower focus on students and subjects. The 1994 district attitude survey given to 134 staff members indicated that 96% had confidence in Shirley's leadership and 90% felt they received support from her.

Shirley's skills have enabled her to balance staff involvement and ownership with her own clearly thought-out alternatives. Her planning is thorough. There are some occasions when her mind is made up in advance. When there is only one alternative that will meet all the requirements, her decision is made. When she has information of which no one else is aware and she does not see spending discussion time as valuable, the decision is made. When the decision process is important, she provides the staff with the opportunity to question the options and provide alternatives. Even when Shirley thinks that one option is most appropriate, she encourages the staff to work through the process with her to develop their ownership for the solution and to enhance the solution itself. However, when she does not know the answer, she listens and asks questions for a long period of time to help her to formulate alternatives. When the staff are involved, they know that she expects them to provide her with high-quality thought and to judge any alternative in the context of the school philosophy.

Trust has made a great impact on decisions at Jasper Place. It has become a two-edged sword. The more the staff have learned to trust Shirley, the more they expect her to be right in the options she offers them. They see her on the cutting edge, and she has encouraged them to think of the school, not just their department or subject, as they provide their suggestions. They demand excellence from each other.

Bolman and Deal (1991) defined leadership as "a relationship between leaders and their constituents. It is a subtle process of mutual influence that fuses thought, feeling, and action to produce collective effort in the service of purposes and values of *both* the leader and the led" (p. 410). The mutual nature of the relationships is what makes things work at Jasper Place.

People respect Shirley for her directness and feel that they have been handled justly. What she seems to have done is to mold and shape those around her much as a diamond can polish and shape another diamond. One of the staff recognized her skill: "She's a master at sculpting. Don't take a sledgehammer and hit a rock and the statue is there. Just keep chipping away the little pieces, and all of a sudden it does appear."

Shirley's strategy for change has worked well. Very rarely have major changes occurred in a short span of time. She works on small changes over time, eventually getting where she wants to be. People have recognized that: "It can be a very small thing, but from that will grow all kinds of wonderful things." Another commented: "Each little piece of the puzzle takes time, but if you have enough little pieces, all of a sudden, the picture is there. It doesn't fall out of the box together. You just take one piece at a time."

It is fascinating to unravel the connections among things that in themselves seem simple. The focus on safety in the school has multiple components, all of which are small. Classroom doors are open. A police resource officer is on staff. Supervision is both inside and outside in the warm weather. The administration team is visible. Emergency plans are in place and practiced. Staff inservice is held on issues of safety. A Code of Behavior is posted in classrooms and in hallways. Multicultural activities celebrate diversity. Advisor classes discuss expectations. Expectations are high. Over time these small things have been put into place and each has contributed to ensuring that Jasper Place is now a safe environment for learning.

The focus on learning has been achieved by a series of small steps as well. Open classroom doors allow students to enter late without drawing attention to themselves. Grade 10 and 11 students must have a full program with no spares. No one is to be in the halls during class time. Honors standing can be obtained by receiving 80% or better in any three courses. The cafeteria is closed during class time, as is the student lounge. A study hall has been opened for students not in class. Extended learning opportunities must be completed before students are allowed to register for second semester. A budget objective has been written that specifies that all students will receive information on learning how to learn. Individually, these actions are not complex. In combination, they make a clear and serious statement that learning is the school's focus.

The influence that Shirley has wielded over the past five years has been felt by everyone. One example recently let Shirley know that the department heads had internalized her philosophy. The Faculty Council met to discuss the allocation of budget money for the 1995-96 school year. Each of the department heads had been asked to come up with the required department budgets, and each had either held the line or gone down. What happened next Shirley related:

> I was so choked up I could hardly handle it. I had asked one of the department heads to come up with a wish list, the CTS department head. He was the second-last guy to speak. What he had done was prepare two lists, a hold list showing what they needed to teach the courses without making any changes that cost money, and a wish list, to put us in the forefront. He came up and said it was quite extensive. Three hundred thousand dollars. Nobody gasped. The English department head said, "That's remarkable. How could you do it for that? I've spoken to people who have said half a million, three-quarters of a million; that's absolutely wonderful."
>
> The whole group endorsed what the guy was doing. Nobody else is getting any extra money; it's all going to CTS, which used to be at the bottom of the barrel. Everyone said that's absolutely terrific. They asked if he was sure he only needed that much. He couldn't believe it.
>
> That is clear evidence that what we do with all of the courses will affect everything in the school. I could never have predicted that.

This incident points out several influences that Shirley has. There is acknowledgement that the courses taught in the CTS department are at least as important for students as other courses offered in the school. The department heads demonstrated concretely that each of them is willing to sacrifice money that could be allocated to them. There is the skill that the CTS department head demonstrated; I believe that he learned it from Shirley. His two lists gave ample indication that he could survive without any additional money, but for progress to be made, it was critical that he receive the money. His strategy worked for CTS. His honesty and directness were valued by the rest of the team.

Jasper Place High School also finds itself in the setting of the school district. Influences from the central administration impact the school.

Shirley views the school as one of 200 showcases for the district. She sees the opportunity for schools to be alike and for schools to be unique. She believes that Jasper Place is "sort of a microcosm of the district. Because we are a high school we can only be one little piece. People should be able to look at us and say, 'Well, we can see how the district works.'" She views the district as a support system for the schools with the trustees setting the framework for the district to operate. Everything that is in place should have as its aim the support of the students.

Effective choices, Shirley believes, should be available, but students should all be able to receive an education in their neighborhood schools if they wish to do so. She does not believe that all schools can be magnet schools. She is committed to providing opportunities for all students who choose Jasper Place to be successful learners.

Over the five years that Shirley has been at Jasper Place, her leadership has enabled the school to shine. She has worked closely with the staff, students and parents to clarify her goals for the school and encourage them to make her goals theirs. Others have been given opportunities to practice and refine their own skills and model their leadership on hers. All have become enhanced by the opportunities provided for them to polish and reflect their skills.

Imperfections

Every diamond has imperfections. Leadership is based on mutual understanding through interactions. Shirley sees things that she thinks will enhance the school. People change, leave; newcomers, staff and students, need to be educated into the ways of the school. Whenever people are involved understanding among them is imperfect. There is always more to do. There is always a gap between the plan for the school and the reality. Monitoring the constant change means that even things that seem to be well in place need to be adapted.

After five years in one setting, Shirley's leadership looks perfect. To an observer, everything runs smoothly with no major interference. It is tempting to assume that it is so because there are no imperfections. I would argue that, although she is not perfect, she recognizes her limitations and has put things into place to compensate for any weaknesses she sees in herself. Leadership cannot be fully realized because you work with people who imperfectly understand. Leaders develop a range of tolerance but schools can never be perfect.

Shirley acknowledged that her constant optimism can be a trial for some of her staff. Some cannot imagine an individual who is never sad, never upset, never grumpy. She believes that her Pollyanna world view would be a criticism leveled by some. Although it is something that could be irritating to some, it is not anything that I could describe as a flaw.

She also confessed to being into everything. One of her hardest struggles is to let go. My sense is this may have been more of a problem in her earlier years at Jasper Place, but she now has a thorough knowledge of the level of competence of her staff and can delegate with more confidence. The staff led me to believe that they appreciated her knowing so much about everything and saw it as a strength, not a weakness.

Details plague Shirley. She likes to ensure that someone who is good with the details is a member of the team. She said: "Once I've got an idea, I'm ready to go with it, so I need detail people." Two of the assistant principals are good detail people, so she is confident that when details need attention, they can handle it.

She also does not like to work alone. She needs the support of a team—not to make decisions for her, but to give her input while she is deciding. She would prefer not to be in a one-administrator school.

People have mentioned her impossibly high standards. One standard that has been difficult to achieve for some is her expectation that everyone will be flexible. Teaching assignments have been broadened for the staff, and some have not felt that they would or could be that flexible. She believes that everyone should be healthy and energetic and like their jobs. This again is hard for some to reach. She expects people to supervise students, to have increased visibility in the school, and to be part of the team if an emergency should arise. The concept of team is critical in all areas of school life. The individual who prefers to close the door, teach, and then leave the school would not meet her expectations. Those who do not believe that all students deserve to be successful in school would not meet Shirley's standards either.

Her willingness to address these issues directly, which I view as a strength, could be seen as a flaw by others. Commenting on teacher behavior outside the school setting could be challenged by some as well. But she could not be faulted for hiding things from people.

Some of the staff thought that she was out of the school too often. The staff felt that they lost out when she was away. "If she were to be stretched too thin, we at our school would not want to suffer." "From a selfish point of view, we say that we would like her in our school as much as possible, to see what we are doing, and to tell people about us."

Shirley has developed constructive alternatives to deal with things that she does not naturally find easy. She has selected a team which has strengths complementary to her own. A science teacher saw her process this way:

> I think being a principal is like teaching. You can teach a person to be a teacher, and the skill develops over the years. I'm sure she had to have some basic things in place in terms of seeing what had to be done and being able to use people to help her do it. One person can't do it alone. I think it's a two-edged thing. You see what has to be done, then you have to have people to support and help you do it.
>
> She knows where her support comes from within the school, and she will call on these people to help her or to advise her on directions of things that may be coming up.

Shirley also acknowledges others on the team. "You have to have people to compensate, you have to have people who can do the detail stuff, and people who can take a crazy idea and ask tough questions. You need that kind of staff."

She also knows what support is available within the district. Her advice to other principals is:

> I think everybody who is an administrator should go downtown even if it's for six months. You figure out the support system. If there is a roadblock, you know who to phone. And I think the best thing I learned downtown was how the politics works. Very interesting. And where you go for help. And what we've got to teach our administrators is to ask for help.

Shirley's leadership style is not the only way. It may not be the best way for everyone to emulate. For her it is effective. I spoke with the pilot principal about alternative strategies that are also effective when dealing with issues that are related to cultural differences. We discussed several that have worked in other contexts. To deal proactively with cultural concerns, he suggested hiring teachers from the racial minorities to be role models in the school. Although the community organizations provide valuable assistance, a staff member has more long-term opportunity to impact student behavior and attitudes. As well, we discussed other celebrations of cultural diversity that his school and others had undertaken.

We also spent time discussing staff who were not supportive of the school's vision. He was not convinced that people could be successfully coached out of a setting. Declaring those people who are negative about the school surplus to the needs of the school is the most straightforward way to move the critics. In his experience, people do not voluntarily leave a high school, even if they are not on board philosophically, because they believe that if they stay for a few years, the principal will leave and the teachers can go back to their comfortable ways. District practice would support their contention. As well, we observed that teachers in high school tended to be more intransigent than their counterparts in elementary and junior high school.

He believes that you can track the subversive staff not by what they say publicly in school, but by their support for the principal identified on the annual district attitude survey. He spoke of one example of a teacher who was not philosophically on board but had stayed at the school for several years. This individual had hidden the negative feelings about the school's direction until a crisis brought the feelings into the open this year. The only way the principal had any indication that there was a dissatisfied staff member prior to this disclosure had been the anonymous response to one of the questions about support for the principal on the district attitude survey. Shirley's 1994 staff survey, done by the district, showed 96% confidence in Shirley's leadership from a total staff of 134, including teachers, support staff and custodians. We spoke about how "strong leaders can carry things." Shirley has been strong enough to silence the critics; someone else might not be. We discussed how it would be interesting to monitor the school over the next school year as a new person takes over.

When we discussed the principal's role as coach, we talked of alternatives to Shirley's indirect coaching style. Other strategies such as actually presenting inservices to the staff, helping the staff the grow to the vision could be effective. Shirley does more informal modelling and uses district consultants to do presentations for the staff. Classroom visits by the principal are also valuable in some schools. The method that is most effective depends of the leader and the context of the school.

Effective principals value visibility and believe that their presence is critical to setting the tone. Whereas I would describe Shirley's visibility as strategic, other strategies that are also effective include actually scheduling members of the administration team to hallways during each day. This ensures that someone is available at all times. The second principal agreed with Shirley in that he could sense changes in the school environment almost immediately when he was in the hallways.

At Jasper Place there is a central spot where a group of teachers, counsellors, and administrators gather each morning, afternoon, and between classes. It is a convivial group who visit with students and each other, and students would easily see Shirley there. It may be that scheduled spots for supervision would ensure wider coverage if a school did not have open doors in all classrooms.

Shirley goes to all student activities and ensures that students, parents, and staff see her, if but for a moment. The pilot principal further supported the importance of his attendance at school events as being vital for setting school tone. Effective leaders work to have a safe and comfortable environment.

Both of these principals teach and both believe that it is an important part of their role. Both gained credibility from the staff by teaching and both have found teaching rewarding. As well, both of them have chosen challenging courses to teach. Assistant principals are available during their class time to avoid interruptions. The pilot principal and I discussed whether this teaching was something that should continue year after year and he felt that although it would be a good idea, it is a large commitment of time. For Shirley it is not a choice, it is a commitment.

Delegation is an important skill for a senior high school principal. Shirley has used trust in the individual as the determiner. She believes that each person should be given tasks that are easy and tasks that require the individual to stretch. In discussion, the pilot principal and I spoke of the importance of being able to coach the person given the task. Both principals are clear that for effective delegation, although they do monitor, they try not to meddle.

Shirley's direction is definitive. When we spoke of openness with the staff, the pilot principal and I discussed other strategies that have worked. He felt that expressing uncertainty and anxiety could bring the team together at times. Opening discussion fully without parameters was a strategy that sometimes has generated totally fresh ideas.

The Unresolved

What are the worries for Shirley, and what has been left undone? Now that she is leaving Jasper Place, someone else will be providing the leadership. A new gem will be set.

While Shirley reflected on some of the things that made her worry, she suggested that it was always things relating to people that worried her the most. Although it was a few years ago, privatizing the cafeteria was a hard step to take. It had to be done for the sake of the budget, but valuable staff lost their positions at Jasper Place. The expulsions were difficult as well, in terms of both the time commitment and in being sure that the right thing was being done. As with all issues, once she has a plan in place, the worries cease. However, it is her sensitivity that shows, and making tough decisions about people will never be something that she enjoys.

Currently, she worries about the school and maintaining the momentum. She is interested in seeing how things develop:

> I don't think it's ever done in a school. That's the nice part. It's easier to get rid of the difficult kids than to work with them. I'm just afraid that I haven't got the commitment to working with the difficult kids ingrained in them so it's just a part of the way they breathe.
>
> We're close because the other day we had a substitute teacher in the school, and he said something to the kids that made them very uncomfortable. Two kids came down and said, "Mrs. Stiles, you shouldn't have that substitute in our school. He's not talking to our kids right." I thought it's actually got down to the level where the kids realize that this guy's out of whack.
>
> When I spoke to him at the end of the day, he said, "This is what I think. There are good kids and there are other kids." I realized that we approach it from a different way. If the students are feeling that it's their right to be treated with dignity and respect, that's when you know you've won the battle.

She knows how difficult it is to make her values the values of others, especially when she will not be there.

She will have the opportunity to coach one third of the district's principals for the next few years. I only hope that I am in the group that is lucky enough to have her as a mentor.

Returning to the Question

The purpose of the study was to increase my understanding of what an effective high school principal did. The everyday practices in which Shirley Stiles engaged pointed out the complexities of the task and the importance of her leadership within the school.

I increased my understanding about high schools. I learned that within a school the size of Jasper Place the 2000 individuals had varied needs and expectations. The school was a complex environment and each day was filled with a wide range of issues, many of which were not related to the primary role of learning. Social, psychological, cultural, behavioral, and legal issues were commonplace.

I began to understand how the expectations of the principalship varied from the expectations in elementary and junior high school. Sharing the leadership roles with a team meant that the principal did not attend to many of the routine matters. What was surprising was how little time Shirley spent on discipline, attendance and scheduling matters. Delegation of tasks spread them throughout the assistant principals and the department heads. Shirley became a "leader of leaders" (Sergiovanni, 1990, p. 110).

Instructional leadership for Shirley was not active involvement in classrooms or coaching teachers but was setting the framework to enable learning to occur. All her interactions with teachers reinforced her beliefs that learning was important and that all students needed programs that enabled them to succeed. Student achievement was honored at Jasper Place. All courses were seen as important. Expectations for achievement and behavior were high. Strategies were put in place that were designed to enhance the learning of all students. I understood that the trust Shirley had in the teachers had increased their commitment. She acknowledged their expertise and visited classrooms not to monitor performance but to enhance her own knowledge of curricula. Her "everyday acts" (McEvoy, 1987) and her "routine behavior" (McNally, 1992) demonstrated her instructional leadership.

I learned that communication skills were very important to her success, and Shirley had put into place many strategies, including personal visibility, notes, and personal contact, to ensure that communication was open. Each day varied, depending on the issues, but being out in the school environment was a daily practice. Her visibility was strategic. She was not in one place for extended periods of time but chose key times to be available. DePree (1989) contended that communication accomplishes much in an organization including building trust, sharing the vision and commitment to the culture. Shirley's leadership was enhanced because she was skilled in listening and asking good questions.

I learned how vital it was to personalize in a large organization. Although much of the literature including Lee, Bryk and Smith (1993) contended that large secondary schools tend to be depersonalized and overly bureaucratized, Jasper Place was viewed by staff, students and parents as a welcoming environment, even as "intimate." The student art gave the environment a homey touch, the notes Shirley wrote pleased the recipients, and her memory for personal details about staff, students, and parents were valued by all. Her 24-hour standard was adhered to faithfully. Phone calls were answered promptly. My personal experience was that any call that I placed was returned within the hour, or I knew when it would be. The informal chats with everyone made the environment friendly and supportive.

I increased my understanding of the process of change in a large organization and how important it was for Shirley to begin her principalship at Jasper Place by "going with the flow." Although she had some strong principles and beliefs, she chose to move slowly and build her support before making substantive changes. Each change she made was a small one but collectively all the changes reinforced her goals for the school. "Educational change is technically simple and socially complex" (Fullan & Stiegelbauer, 1991, p. 65).

Shirley used her time to plan, to personalize and to gather information. Before any decisions were made, she spoke formally and informally with a wide range of staff, not just the leadership team. She knew the strengths of her staff and capitalized on matching their strengths to the tasks to be completed. I learned how important the whole picture was for Shirley and how each of her decisions was consistent within her philosophical framework. I understood how her staff had grown to value that consistency and to be confident in the decisions that were made. I also understood how important it was for Shirley to be proactive. Covey (1990) pointed out that proactive people are positive, focusing on things they can do something about. Shirley spent no time on matters that were outside her control. Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991), in summarizing what effective principals do, found two things which stood out:

> They showed an active interest by spending time talking with teachers, planning, helping teachers get together, and being knowledgeable about what was happening. And they all figured out ways of reducing the amount of time spent on routine administrative matters; they made sure that change had an equal priority. (p. 168)

Shirley's vision for the school was clear. "Leadership is making the things happen that you believe in or envision" (Barth, 1990, p. 124). In her five years at Jasper Place she talked about her beliefs, demonstrated her beliefs, and stuck to her beliefs; and I found no one in the school who could not articulate her beliefs. She knew how important it was to "walk the talk." But I also learned that the complete vision did not have to be in place before you could begin to move. Barth and Pansegrau's (1994) image of "growing a vision" was clearly demonstrated at Jasper Place. Shirley was creative in developing new ideas, receptive to suggestions from others, immersed in reading about schools and schooling and was able to mold each new piece to fit her vision. All the components enhanced the overall vision as it grew.

I enhanced my understanding of cultural leadership. I understood how Shirley had shaped Jasper Place in her vision and how she had created a "cultural tapestry" (Cunningham & Gresso, 1993, p. 32) with a color and texture acceptable to the staff, students and parents. The "ambience" (Goodlad, 1984) of Jasper Place reflected Shirley's vision and the acceptance of this vision by the school community.

I learned that it was possible as a leader to have strong values and beliefs and at the same time allow for staff to feel a sense of freedom within the boundaries of a leader's philosophy. There was no doubt that Shirley's boundaries were in place at Jasper Place and that people have accepted those boundaries. On Shirley's arrival, initial negotiations with the department heads who were the power holders equalized the importance of all staff, and expectations for equal treatment of all were put in place. Shirley was fair and was perceived to be fair. Peters and Waterman's (1982) "loose-tight principle" suggests that firm central direction and maximum individual autonomy are properties of excellent organizations. Staff have much autonomy within her boundaries.

Because her philosophy has led to an increase in student achievement and safety in the school, results that are seen as desirable by everyone, people have accepted her leadership. Her staff are loyal as demonstrated by 96% of the staff being confident in her leadership. This led me to believe that loyalty grew because of the positive results that occurred under her leadership. Barth (1990) observed that "an able principal has the capacity to create conditions that elicit the best from most students, teachers, and parents most of the time" (p. 64).

I increased my understanding of simplicity in leadership. Shirley's goals for the school were not complex. Two things stood out: (a) Learning was the focus, and (b) the environment was safe. Plans were made and decisions were based on those two ideals. It was not necessary to have complicated objectives even in a large school.

I saw the result of involving people in the decisions that affect them. People supported Shirley in the actions she took because they felt involved in the decisions. I understood how crafted her planning skills were and how skillfully she has encouraged involvement that resulted in both meeting her vision and satisfying her staff, students and parents. I was not able to find any member of staff who expressed philosophical differences, although some did indicate they admired her so much they would not object to things that were not exactly as they would wish. Participative decision making has been seen in the literature to have many advantages over autocratic decision-making. Lindelow, Coursen, Mazzarella, Heynderickz, and Smith (1989) contended that the task facing the school leader "involves maximizing several variables—the efficiency of decision-making, the quality of decisions, the use of professional expertise, and the satisfaction of those affected by the decisions made" (p. 159). Shirley had balanced these requirements to ensure efficiency as well as support for the decisions.

I increased my understanding of the importance of the concept of team which is supported in the literature by many including Cunningham and Gresso (1993), Fullan and Hargreaves (1991), Lindelow and Bentley (1989), Louis and Miles (1990) and Murgatroyd and Morgan (1992). The teachers were supported both personally and professionally. The assistant principals had complementary skills, and each worked closely with Shirley to assist the staff. Custodial and support staff were well supported, the head custodian and the head secretary taking responsibility for their teams. Professional development was available to all and handled by each department. Department heads alerted the administration team to any concerns. Shirley also had a strong intuitive sense and responded to feelings as well as words and actions.

I also increased my understanding of the importance of reflection in leadership. Shirley was a reflective administrator. She thought about what she did prior to doing it and was able to explain why she had chosen an alternative. There was only one instance when she said that she wanted to come back to a topic I had raised. I had asked her whether she spent much time in classrooms. She had said that she did not, although when she first arrived she had. The next time she spoke with me, she had obviously thought about it and explained that she had delegated that responsibility to the department heads and did not want to be seen to be distrusting them or interfering with their process.

As well I confirmed my belief in the importance of the context of the school. Parent and community involvement were critical to changing the perceptions about the school. Involving the business community in the school and the students in the business community enhanced the success of Jasper Place. Fullan (1993) pointed out that "to prosper, schools must be actively plugged into their environments; schools must respond to the issues of the day—and contribute to them" (p. 129). Shirley clearly demonstrated how her interactions with the community, including business, social agencies, churches and community leagues worked to the advantage of the school. She was prepared to cooperate in any way if it would make a difference for the students. She was conscious of her role in supporting public education and in ensuring that the results for students at Jasper Place were a concrete example of the success of public education.

Through this study I increased my understanding of making visible the taken for granted. I learned that very often we do things as leaders without consciously thinking about the reason. My own thinking about the exemplary leadership of Shirley Stiles has made me reflect upon my own acts as a leader and has made me more thoughtful as I begin my new assignment.

Summary

"Wise leaders understand their own strengths, work to expand them, and build teams that together can provide leadership in all four modes—structural, political, human resource, and symbolic" (Bolman & Deal, 1991, p. 445). Shirley's wisdom has enabled her to build a vibrant and comfortable learning environment where each person is valued and works to enhance the image of the school.

Implications

Further Research

This study has provided a picture of what one effective senior high school principal does, in a large urban setting. Additional descriptive studies of other effective high school principals would provide a rich source of alternatives which would expand the understanding of the high school principalship. My pilot study was one indication of the variety of possibilities for actions by principals with similar philosophies but different contexts.

Unlike much of the research that is based on principals' responses to questionnaires and interviews, actual observation of the principal, reflective conversation, and interviews with others give a more realistic and complete picture of the person's values and beliefs as reflected in his or her actions.

Additional studies using a second person to provide another way of looking at issues could supply other examples of this strategy. The researcher and the co-researcher both saw the strategy as a learning experience. The principals had opportunities to discuss the project with each other. I believe that further examination of this technique would prove beneficial to all involved.

The concept of *team* proved to be very important in this setting. This and other concepts such as multiculturalism might be explored further in the urban high school setting.

As well, not all high schools are large; similar research might be conducted in small schools to disclose the leadership issues faced by principals in those settings.

Educational Practice

This study has used a methodology which has been a positive learning experience for both the researcher and the participant. Observation, reflective conversation, and journal writing should be included as professional-development activities for current principals. Intervisitations between principals to observe and discuss common issues would add to the skill repertoire of both individuals. Shirley has used the strategy of principal exchange. This was a meaningful first step for each principal to gain an understanding of the context of the other person. Effective learning would take place as each principal watched the other in the respective environments and reflected on what had occurred.

Graduate-level university training should also use the shadowing strategy. Teacher training has always included experiences in classrooms; principal training should include experiences in leadership. There is an important role for the coach in both cases.

School districts should consider programs of this nature for principals-in-training as well, providing each prospective leader with a mentor chosen on the basis of his or her effectiveness. Current principals in one-administrator schools could particularly benefit from the opportunity to observe and reflect with another principal.

Reviews of descriptive studies should be done by senior administrators in district offices. Although the studies do not provide a list of generalized characteristics for effective leadership, the studies do look at a total school experience and in what varied activities principals engage. Assistance of a general nature could be provided, by reviewing effective principals' experiences, in selecting those people who have exceptional leadership potential. Shirley Stiles' expertise has been recognized by Edmonton Public Schools, and for the next few years she will be a coach for approximately 70 principals in the district.

This study also suggested that further exploration of the concept of *team* would be valuable. Strategies to involve teachers in the school could be studied to enhance our understanding of how to build effective school teams.

The focus on safety at Jasper Place school could be expanded to determine what other high schools do to ensure that the students are in a safe learning environment. This could have practical implications for school and school-district policy.

The relationship between the school and the community could be studied further. How schools involve themselves in the community and how the community is involved in schools could be explored to assist others to provide a wider scope of opportunities in their own schools and communities. This could be combined with an analysis of the variety of student involvement in high schools.

As I observed the assistant principals and department heads at Jasper Place, I confirmed that leadership can be taught. Bolman and Deal (1994), in discussing leadership development, stressed that,

> rather than emphasizing rationality, control, and efficiency, leadership development programs will need to highlight political strategies of bargaining, building coalitions, and finding common agenda among conflicting interests. Programs will need to reinforce in potential leaders the importance of values, symbols, and symbolic activity and how these can be shaped and encouraged to give meaning and purpose to collective endeavors. (p. 93)

Shirley has provided that opportunity for staff to learn. Although they have learned the skills of management and what a leader does, the primary learning has been what Shirley represents.

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